Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

Wolfgang Lederer

BRIDGING TWO WORLDS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN, EDUCATION, AND ILLUSTRATION

With an Introduction by
Steve Reoutt

Interviews Conducted by
Harriet Nathan
in 1988

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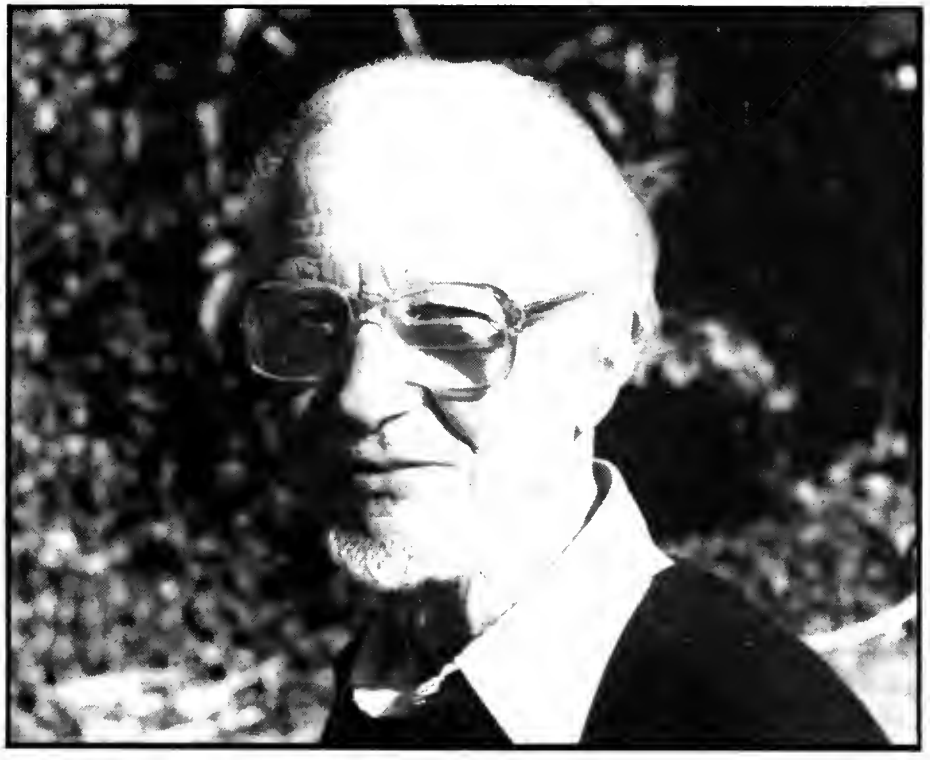

Wolfgang Lederer, 1991

Photograph by Thomas Lederer

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LEDERER, Wolfgang (b. 1912) Graphic designer

Bridging Two Worlds in Graphic Design, Education, and Illustration, 1992
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Family and citizenship in Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the United States; background in art, music, theater; professional education in art, graphic arts and design, book crafts at Leipzig, Paris, and Prague; Naziism; Vienna book publishers; to New York, 1939, and San Francisco, 1941; US publishers, package design, book jackets, greeting cards; Arts and Crafts movement; California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, 1941-1980: teaching advanced design and advertising art as chair, Department of Graphic Design and director, Division of Design; free-lancing: California wine industry, labels, publications, illustration work, designing journals and prize-winning books.

Introduction by Steve Reoutt, artist and professor.

Interviewed 1988 by Harriet Nathan for the Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area Series. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

The art and business of printing in the San Francisco Bay Area are significant in the history of printing in the United States and have been an integral part of the cultural development of California. This series of interviews with people who have been participants in and observers of the recent history of San Francisco Bay Area printing stems from a 1958 interview by Francis P. Farquhar with Edward DeWitt Taylor. It has been carried forward in the interest of recording details of the movement and analyzing factors in its development.

To the series have been added interviews concerning other related aspects of the San Francisco Bay Area book world: writing, illustrating, and designing books, collecting, and selling them as well.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The purpose of oral history memoirs is to capture and preserve for future research the perceptions, recollections, and observations of these individuals. Research and preparation of a topic outline precede the interview sessions. The outline is prepared in conjunction with close associates and other persons in the memoirist's field, as well as with the memoirist, who in turn may use the suggestions as aids to memory, choose among them, or add new topics.

The tape-recorded interviews are transcribed, lightly edited by the interviewer, and reviewed and approved by the memoirist. Index and other materials are added. Final processing includes final corrections, photographic reproduction, binding, and deposit in The Bancroft Library and other selected libraries and collections. The volumes do not constitute publications, but are primary research material made available under specified conditions for the use of researchers.

The Regional Oral History Office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Ruth Teiser, Series Director
Books and Printing in the San
Francisco Bay Area Series

Willa Baum, Division Head

June 1992
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area
Interviews Completed June 1992

Dorothy and Lewis Allen, Book Printing with the Handpress, 1968.

Valenti Angelo, Arts and Books: A Glorious Variety, 1980.

Brother Antoninus, Brother Antoninus: Poet, Printer, and Religious, 1966.

Mallette Dean, Artist and Printer, 1970.

Edward Grabhorn, Recollections of the Grabhorn Press, 1968.

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The Hand Bookbinding Tradition in the San Francisco Bay Area. Interviews with Leah Wollenberg, Stella Parti, Duncan Olmsted, Stephen Gale Herrick, and Barbara Fallon Hiller, 1982.

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Bernhard Schmidt, Herman Diedrichs, Max Schmidt, Jr., The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Volume I, 1968.

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Albert Sperisen, San Francisco Printers, 1925-1965, 1966.

Jack W. Stauffacher, A Printed Word Has its Own Measure, 1969.

George R. Stewart, A Little of Myself, 1972.

Edward DeWitt Taylor, Supplement to Francis P. Farquhar Interview, 1960.

Adrian Wilson, Printing and Book Designing, 1966.

INTRODUCTION--by Steve Reoutt

When Steve Reoutt was writing the Lederer Introduction, he spoke of knowing what he wanted to say and working to say it in his "own voice," to sound like himself. As the conversation developed, he and the interviewer observed that the interview form itself provides a time-honored means of conveying the speaker's own voice and choice of words. The decision followed: this Introduction is in the form of an interview.

Reoutt: Since Wolfgang Lederer will have covered various aspects of his teaching and professional work in his oral memoir, I will not go into any detail in those areas. Also, having read many letters of recommendation (and this introduction is a recommendation of sorts) I will try to avoid the clichés and stock phrases which crop up abundantly in this form of writing.

I first met Wolfgang over thirty years ago when he was my teacher in Design. He was always dressed in a white, long-sleeved shirt with a narrow dark tie. He was always bringing posters, brochures, clippings, packages, all kinds of stuff to illustrate lectures, which took place in virtually every class.

Nathan: Why do you think he brought so much stuff to class?

Reoutt: When you are teaching in a visual field, words are often inadequate, so students need to experience seeing actual examples of drawings, design, illustration. In architecture, one can best experience it standing within the actual space of the building, within the three dimensions.

Drawing has its own language, vocabulary, syntax, like music. The visual arts have their own language that one can understand only by looking.

Nathan: As a student what else did you notice about his teaching style?

Reoutt: Wolfgang was always on time, organized, formal, seemingly stern. He never missed any of his classes.

Nathan: What did he do that seemed formal to you?

Reoutt: He addressed his students as either Mr. or Miss. No one ever dared call him by anything other than Mr. Lederer. He had a kind of European manner that I am familiar with. In my own upbringing I have always addressed my elders formally, in the plural rather than the singular. In French the formal address is "vous," "tu" is familiar.

Nathan: How does your own style of teaching compare with Wolfgang's?

Reoutt: Wolfgang was very serious; no joking.

I am now roughly the same age as he was when I was his student. Times change. I am more informal with students. We use first names, go out together to smoke, chit-chat.

I cannot now pick out some specific words or principles or skills he taught me. All that has blended with the many more things learned from him since, as our friendship developed.

Nathan: What have you learned from him as a friend?

Reoutt: [laughs] So many things, a lot quite intangible; learning some of life's wisdom (not how to operate a piece of machinery), but more complex learning, about attitudes.

I can see modulation of my opinions of painters, other people's work. Over a span of time, I would notice that I began to see things in a clearer light, due to what I heard Wolfgang say. These were the kinds of lessons: no false airs, straightforward, unassuming.

Also over the years he has been a very active person; both he and his wife Hanni live life. Last year they went to Europe. They couldn't do everything as they used to, but they pushed to the maximum; that didn't stop their enjoyment. Wolfgang has not given up, he's very much alive.

I could at this point enumerate Wolfgang's many admirable qualities such as his unaffected, natural, genuine manner; his warmth, enthusiasm, sensitivity, willingness to help. I could mention his good humor and charm, his interest in music, literature, the visual arts.

Nathan: Yes. Can you say a bit more about his enthusiasm? For what? How is it expressed?

Reoutt: When he discusses the work of designers, artists, illustrators, his teacher Hugo Steiner-Prag, he expresses liveliness, the feeling is quite unmistakable. Some teachers are bored: "Oh boy, here it starts again." That is the kind you don't want.

With Wolfgang, the talk is always about the matter at hand: like the Design Department and its improvement. His seriousness is unmistakable, and his concern. I still feel, when I go to have dinner with Wolfgang and Hanni, that they are very much involved. It's fun for me. We are not bored, not making small conversation. Wolfgang is an alive human being.

Nathan: Yes. Wolfgang showed me a painting he obviously liked very much: a last and a shoe. When I admired it, he said that it was your work.

Reoutt: I gave it to Hanni in the summer of 1988. I'm not sure of the occasion, maybe a birthday. I have also given paintings to Wolfgang, and vice-versa. I have several of his.

Nathan: Would you care to comment on the interpretation that each form shapes the other, perhaps like a teacher and a student? Was that in your mind?

Reoutt: No, I did not think of that meaning, but when I talk to my students, I tell them that pictures may have many meanings, and the artist may not be aware of them. A viewer brings his own viewpoint that he can read into the picture, so pictures can have a great range of meaning. This is especially true of pictures painted one hundred years ago. Modern eyes are different. When we look at those old paintings, when we look at history, we bring our own lamps.

Nathan: I see. Now that you have observed Wolfgang over many years, do you have more to say about his individual style?

Reoutt: It must have been the early '80s. Wolfgang had already retired from teaching. I was walking to the faculty parking lot with Robert Harper, for many years the school librarian. He mentioned that Wolfgang had been in the library the day before, and we chatted about him over the space of a hundred yards or so. I do not remember any of the conversation, except that we concluded that Wolfgang was one of the last of his kind--they don't make them like that any more--a dying breed; words to that effect. (Well, so much for clichés.)

Nathan: What were you thinking about when you said "the last of his kind"?

Reoutt: His European upbringing, it doesn't exist any more here or in Europe. There is not that kind of educated person, with the broad scope of interests. Wolfgang knows Shakespeare, Goethe, the Russian 19th century novelists. He studied Latin. He hated it, but he knew it. His education had strictness. There was a courtesy; manners nowadays are different. As life changes, things are bound to change also.

Nathan: Wolfgang had mentioned that he thinks of himself as a man who spans two cultures, the European and the American. How does that strike you?

Reoutt: I believe that is still true. We were talking about summer vacations. I said that in the summer I wake up, make a fire, have some coffee, read a book. Wolfgang said, "I envy you." He said that even now he has to work a full day before he can sit down and read a book for enjoyment.

Nathan: You have know each other as teacher and student, as colleagues, and as friends. How did this come about?

Reoutt: I was fortunate that the end of my undergraduate days, after an interruption of six years, would lead to a much, much closer relationship with Wolfgang when he invited me to teach in his department in 1967.

Two years went by when we were both on the faculty of the California College of Arts and Crafts, and I still called him Mr. Lederer, perhaps because of my Russian background. One day I wrote him a letter and said, "May I call you Wolfgang?" He replied, "Of course." Now that I know Wolfgang well, I know that he would not have wished to create a barrier of formality. He is one of the warmest people I know.

Over these past twenty-four years, Wolfgang has become such a friend as you count on the fingers of one hand. Here I must also count his wife, Hanni, who has been indispensable to Wolfgang. I don't quite see how he could have managed without her. I know he would have, but I don't see just how.

Steve Reoutt
Professor of Design
California College of Arts and Crafts

April 22, 1991
Oakland, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--Wolfgang Lederer

Wolfgang Lederer is the twenty-fourth memoirist in the oral history series on Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area. In art, graphic design, teaching, and the responsibilities of citizenship, he recognizes that he is a man of two worlds: European by birth and education, and American by choice. A voluntary refugee from Hitler, he has analyzed the educational, artistic, and political traditions both of his European heritage and those he found in America, achieving a personal balance that links the best of each into a single system.

Changes in the political map of Europe have made Wolfgang Lederer in turn an Austrian, German, and Czech citizen; in his fourth citizenship he is American. He learned and practiced drawing and painting, graphic arts, typography and book production in Leipzig, Paris, Prague, and Vienna, cultivating skills even as he moved ahead of Hitler's forces before a daring escape to the United States in 1939.

He pledged himself to fight shoddiness in his own work, and expects his students to do the same. He has won acclaim in book and journal design, illustration, drawing, lettering, in greeting cards and broadsides, and a wide range of work for business and industry. Students call him inspiring, based in part on his way of connecting rigorous standards of quality with an appreciation for innovation and spontaneity. When Wolfgang Lederer compares his own early school days and rigid education with the more open American style, he embraces the American public school system, recognizing its problems and responding to its promise.

He saw Disney's Snow White in Prague, and perceived that "America cannot be all that wild, with people . . . only money-grubbing and everybody at each other's throat. There must be a sort of, almost childlike, sense of acceptance and friendly attitudes and most of all, a wonderful sense of humor." He expected friendliness, courtesy, and humor, and he found them all.

When he came to visit and then remain in the San Francisco Bay Area, he found the book publishing scene less vigorous here than in New York. He developed ways to combine his own art and design work with a long association with the California College of Arts and Crafts, where he served as chair of the Department of Graphic Design, and Director of the Division of Design.

Wolfgang Lederer understood the arts and crafts movement and approached graphic design with respect. When the interviewer spoke of "commercial art," he asked quietly, "May I correct you?" The term seemed to him to denigrate graphic design as "something not quite decent," in contrast to fine art, which was. He said, "I hope . . . I have conveyed that in everything we graphic designers are doing . . . . we should be imbued with a tremendous sense of responsibility, because what we are doing is, in terms of influence on the public, much more widespread than in general what the so-called fine artists are doing."

His sense of commitment and responsibility applies equally to designs for Alfred E. Heller's quarterly World's Fair; books, watermarks, and illustrations for Harold A. Berliner, who publishes fine editions; journals and wine labels for the California wine industry; and illustrations for a toy store's newsletter.

Book design was his greatest joy and first love, and has developed into a post-retirement second career. For the University of California Press he has designed books like Literary Architecture and Giovanni and Lusanna, that have brought him and the Press honors and acclaim. He greets such recognition with surprise and gratitude, but no false modesty. He makes sure that all his work is excellent, but nevertheless he can still be startled by praise.

Wolfgang Lederer provided five interviews for this oral history memoir: on March 2, May 23, June 15, July 5, and July 26, 1988. Before the sessions, the interviewer provided a suggested outline of questions based on conversations, published materials, and a review of some of his work. The interviews were taped, transcribed, lightly edited, and submitted with a few questions for his review and approval. He reviewed the material with care and made a number of improvements.

For each interview he sat at the diningroom table in his Kensington home, an alert man of seventy-six, trim, and with a scholar's eyeglasses and small grey beard. He spoke readily and easily, having planned the major points to be covered in each session, and at ease in responding to questions. A number of ideas sparked his enthusiasm, from the mastery of Hermann Zapf's letter design, to the wit of the folk art and toys in Santa Fe's Girard collection. His demeanor was modest but confident, and while he referred wryly to the remnants of German speech patterns and accent, now slight and pleasing to the ear, his speech was fluent and colloquial, and his style that of one thoroughly at home in this country.

His wife and companion Hanni has provided the garden and the flower-filled deck beyond the French doors, the vases of fresh flowers, tea and pound-cake and dinners without number. Her kitchen also holds cabinets of books and toys so the grandchildren can help themselves.

Adult dinner guests summoned to the Lederers' table quickly scan their places to find the individualized place cards that are miniature works of art. He has created each one, and the guests tuck them away safely even before they take their seats and shake out their napkins.

As a supplement to his oral history memoir, Wolfgang Lederer has prepared a collection of examples of several types of his work, including some that demonstrate stages of development in a piece of graphic art. He has also gathered examples of publications he designed. The collection will be deposited in The Bancroft Library for use in research. A list of the items is appended.

The oral history memoir of Wolfgang Lederer was supported by contributions from more than thirty friends, family members, colleagues, clients, and former students. Their contributions are deeply appreciated. Particular thanks are due to Harold A. Berliner, Claudine and Hellmut E. Gerson, Steve Reoutt, and Jean R. Wente, for their efforts in making the Lederer memoir a reality. Steve Reoutt also contributed a perceptive introduction to the memoir of his former teacher, his colleague, and his friend.

Harriet Nathan
Interviewer/Editor

June 1992
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The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
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Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name WOLFGANG LEDERER

Date of birth JANUARY 16 · 1912 Birthplace MANNHEIM (Germany)

Father's full name FELIX LEDERER

Occupation MUSIC CONDUCTOR Birthplace PRAGUE (then Austria)

Mother's full name DORA DEETJEN

Occupation — Birthplace BREMEN (Germany)

Your spouse HANNI HIRSCHBERG

Your children THOMAS, ANDREW

Where did you grow up? MANNHEIM, SAARBRÜCKEN (Germany)

Present community BERKELEY - KENSINGTON

Education 1918 - 1921 PRIVATE SCHOOL - 1921 - 1930 GYMNASIUM · 1931 - 1933 Academy for Graphic Art & Book Design, Leipzig (Germany), 1933 - 34 Paris attended classes Académie Scandinave, Paris 1934 - 36 Prague, Officina Pragensis

Occupation(s) Graphic designer Illustrator. Teacher in these fields

Areas of expertise Drawing, Lettering, Typography, Graphic design production

Other interests or activities Drawing, painting (Life, nature, architecture) Music (non-active) Literature

Organizations in which you are active Pacific Center for the Book arts / San Francisco Study Center (Community Graphics) / Book Guild of ...

Wolfgang Lederer

IN THE LATE 80S THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF GRAPHIC ARTS noted, "The focal point of graphic work is no longer exclusively New York City. California has evolved into a significant design force....The California look indicates stronger individual styles, color vitality, and freedom of spirit." This shift has come about, in part, because of Wolfgang Lederer, founder of the School of Design at California College of Arts and Crafts and faculty member from 1941 to 1980. His design philosophies and management of the department over the years laid the foundation for training a core of designers on the West Coast who now are being recognized nationally and internationally.

The arts and crafts tradition which founder Frederic Meyer had established at CCAC supported Lederer's approach. "The idea that the arts belong together, and you don't have to say this is where one thing starts and another ends, appealed to me very much," Lederer explains. "When Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, he was given a project where he had to fit into certain architectural shapes, he had to make it visible from a great distance, he had to illustrate certain stories from the Bible, and it had to be understandable by the people. How is that different from what other communicators do?"

Lederer says that design always comes back to communicating certain basic things about society, and in order to have a vision behind the design, the designer must understand society. "When you talk about the world in which the graphic designer lives, it is a world that the designer must understand in all its phases. If you take art as one of the most visible expressions of society in a certain time, whether negative or positive, then you realize that the graphic designer cannot be a person who is apart from the world, whether it is political life or personal life, etc. Students must be brought in touch, not only in the means of doing their work, but also with their world."

Guiding design principles that Lederer stressed in his teaching and in his personal practice were clarity in presentation, regardless of style, method, or execution; clarity of type, so that the type works with all the other elements in the given space; the discipline of careful observation; the deep traditional roots of design; and "decency" in design, i.e. being responsible to the large groups of people who will see the work. "It is not necessary to use vulgar words or vulgar design concepts just to attract attention," he emphasizes.

Lederer's career began with education in the book arts in Europe. Studying at the Academy of Graphic Arts, Leipzig, the Academie Scandinave, Paris, and the Officina Pragensis, Prague, he learned from European masters, designing books that were works of art created with someone else's words.

He emigrated to the United States in 1939 to escape the growing Nazi threat in Europe. On a trip to San Francisco in 1941 Lederer met Frederic Meyer, founder and President of CCAC, who was familiar with Lederer's work and had an opening as an instructor of two classes: commercial art and advanced design. Lederer accepted a teaching position, and a long association had begun.

Gradually broadening the scope of classes and curriculum, Lederer became Director of the Design Division. In the meantime, his signature style—simple, clean, "not flamboyant or showy"—began to attract the attention of the University of California Press and the burgeoning California wine industry. Winemakers were becoming more aggressive about promoting their product and for twenty years Lederer was the Art Director for Wine Publications and Western Farm Publications in San Francisco.

Although he has been retired since 1980, Lederer has been "as busy as ever" designing for UC Press, Presidio Press and Chronicle Books. His influence also lives on in his students.

"I still practice what he taught me," says Bill Yamada '73, Executive Vice President and Creative Director of Wells Rich Greene/BDDP in New York. "He was ahead of his time (in the design field) in asserting that concept and ideas drive the design, and in fact, were crucial to any design project. You must have a vision."

Clarity and discipline were the hallmarks of the Lederer style, both in design and in teaching. "I can still hear him say 'Make the round things round and the square things square,'" says Ken Lavey '48, Creative Director and Vice Chairman of Lavey/Wolff/Swift in New York. "He has a keen awareness of the dynamics of design; he exposed students to all types of techniques, styles and design and insisted that our creations begin with fine craftsmanship and work up to the final artistic product.."

It is appropriate that the department Lederer worked so hard to build is now in the hands of one of his students. Recognized around the world for his work, Michael Vanderbyl '68, is Dean of the School of Design and principal in Michael Vanderbyl Design. Even as he trains the next generation of designers, Vanderbyl acknowledges the foundation laid by Lederer. "Historically, the department of design is based in the arts and crafts philosophy of CCAC," he says. "Due to Wolfgang's leadership, those roots are very strong."

I FAMILY AND EARLY YEARS

[Interview 1: May 2, 1988]

Nathan: Shall we talk a little about your family and the early years and perhaps the experiences that shaped your interests?

Parents' Background and Interests

Lederer: Well, I was born in 1912 in Mannheim, a German city of about 200,000 inhabitants, in which my father had a position at the Municipal Theater as a conductor. The theater and orchestra at that time still had a tie to the court of the principality of Baden. It had a long and famous tradition; the young Mozart spent a year there in hopes of securing a position at the court. The role of conductor in such a municipal theater was different from the high-pressure situation we know here, inasmuch as such a theater was totally supported by the city and state, and for that reason was allowed much more leeway in operation. It also was a position that he had for a whole year with paid vacations, and it was renewed year after year. The main conductor next to him was Arthur Bodanzky, who went to New York before the outbreak of World War I, as conductor of the German wing of the Metropolitan Opera.

Nathan: What sorts of musical events took place in that theater?

Lederer: The theater was devoted to opera, operetta, ballet, and plays. It covered the whole spectrum of theatrical activities, performed year-around by a resident staff of singers, actors and musicians. Theaters of that kind existed in great numbers

all through Germany. There were (and still are) maybe sixty-five of them in Germany, ranging in size, scope and quality, depending on the size of the city, and on what it could afford.

My father came from Prague, and as such I was born an Austrian. Only later on my father, since he knew that the children--I have two brothers--would live and make our careers in Germany as he did himself, acquired the German citizenship. That citizenship he bought after we had, after the First World War, become automatically Czechoslovakians. So that actually the American citizenship is my fourth citizenship, which has influenced my whole outlook on the world. I do not have a very strong sense of coming from a certain country, although my cultural background is certainly, very definitely, influenced by everything that happened in my education in Germany.

My father was Jewish but had adopted the Christian religion as a very automatic act that everybody who wanted to make a go in the theater world did. It never meant anything to him one way or another. He always professed to be a Jew, and later on, since we were brought up Christian, also refused to participate in the regular ritual of confirmation. In other words, he did not come to the church. He felt that was not his place to be. But apart from that, religion had no particular influence on his life.

In his background were merchants, and his father had, as a young man, together with his brother, made a trip around the world, at which point they also landed in San Francisco. The brother liked it so much here that he stayed, which meant that when I came to America, there were three elderly cousins of mine.

Simply to indicate his upbringing and to give the background of his musical career, he was a very precocious child and very ill-suited for the school life as it was then. He recruited the help of the young Gustav Mahler, who was at that time a conductor at the Prague Opera House, to persuade his father to take him out of school. So he entered the conservatory when he was fifteen, where his conducting instructor was Felix Mottl, a man who was famous in Bayreuth. His instructor in composition was Dvorak. So there are some famous names in the background.

My mother came from a totally different world. I could describe it probably best by simply saying it was the world of the *Buddenbrooks*. Anybody who has read that book by Thomas Mann knows these north German Protestant merchants, who had

prominent positions as senators in the city government, were the characters of the book and the types of people in my mother's background. In addition to that, there was always a sprinkling of art, but never in the visual fields. In literature, one of my ancestors was a translator of all the works of Shakespeare. The translations were published, although they never became popular.

Another one went with Schliemann to Troy. The most prominent was the poet, Kotzebue. Kotzebue's sister played with the young Goethe as a child. In later years, Goethe asked her to write something into his album, which was a traditional thing to do, and he wrote for her a lovely and beautifully worded thank-you note which is hanging right here on the wall. That's a very precious possession for me.

What reached me of all this, meant actually that music, literature, and my parents' great interest in the visual arts influenced my youth considerably, but strangely at the total neglect of the mercantile side of all this background. In other words, all practical matters about money and finance, or anything of that kind, simply did not enter into my awareness. They weren't even considered as something that one should really talk about. It was considered not very refined. To this day, matters of money are totally foreign to me.

On the other hand, there was in addition to that, with many artists coming into the house as friends or visiting artists and so on, a great deal of life in music and beauty. I grew up with the idea that the only thing that really mattered in life is art.

We lived in Mannheim through the First World War. Tales of battles, the sight of wounded men, deprivation of food are an essential memory of my early childhood years. Mannheim, having a war industry, was attacked by planes with bombs--French and English--and so in the night very often we had to go down to the basement and stay there until the all-clear alarm was sounded.

School System in Germany

Lederer: I started school in Mannheim with a system that may warrant some explanation. The schools were definitely divided according to social lines, or you might say income lines. Children whose parents could not afford to pay for higher

education went to the general school until they were fourteen. They became then apprentices, or worked in shops, or other jobs that were open to them without the so-called higher education.

We went from ages six to nine to a private school which kept us from getting in touch with the "lower classes." I have to make the sign of quotation marks there, because it is a definite indication of the distinctions that existed at that time. After these three years, we transferred to the Gymnasium, which is a school of higher learning with a curriculum that included three languages. It started out, to my infinite pain, with Latin, which I had to take for nine years, an effort that made me hate everything connected with that area to this day. Then, after two years, French was added, and after three years, we had the choice to either add English or Greek. In our case it was decided that the third language would be English, which came in somewhat handily later on. At least it offered some background.

My school experiences were essentially very unhappy because I was not made for that kind of life. It was all very regimented with tremendous demands, so it seemed to me, or so it was for my kind of intellectual setup. It was even worse later on when in 1922 we moved to Saarbrücken where the schools were even more old-fashioned and backward, with beatings for not only disobedience but also for not knowing the vocabulary that was assigned to us, or the irregular verbs, or things of that kind.

I must say, as a balance, if this is meant to be a description of the school life of that time, that other people had better experiences. For instance, my older brother reacted totally differently, and he in fact, just to call it a story in two ways, regretted that my parents didn't send him to the Greek section later on, which he felt would have been more valuable to him. Yet, I have remained skeptical about accumulated knowledge as the measure of an educated mind after experiencing how so many of the very people who had received this higher education in Germany later failed to recognize the stupidity and vileness of the Nazi doctrine and how so many of them followed it blindly.

Nathan: Were the girls and boys separate?

Lederer: It was strictly separated. Later on in the last three years, girls could be admitted. There was a sprinkling of them in the school, but they were more or less oddities there.

Maybe also in going ahead with a tale, I might say that coming to America, nothing, but nothing, impressed me more positively than the difference in the schools. That, to my mind, remains the great dividing line. As I know, not everything is right, and whatever is not right that happens in the schools or does not happen at times, still does not change my feeling that that is the crucial thing that sets America apart from Europe. What people can get in the schools--even if they do not get good learning or heaps of information--they still get a better sense of how people should interact. That to my mind is absolutely crucial.

It helped that when I came to America--and I'm now somewhat anticipating already later events--I had a girlfriend who was a high school teacher. And from what she told me there, I was absolutely goggle-eyed. Later my brother and his wife came to America and both became high school teachers at a private school in Putney, Vermont. My son has now been for twenty years a high school teacher in California. So that has expanded and enriched considerably my observation and my awareness of the difference in the schools here and as I knew them in Germany.

I sense that the way I had experienced school, as an oppressive institution, makes evident that it was detrimental to shaping young minds, or that it influenced bad character traits to a great extent because in defense against so much oppression, we became oftentimes mean and arrogant. We tried to cheat whenever we could. As a matter of fact, I believe one couldn't get through the school with all its demands without cheating unless one happened to be a learning genius.

When I later on heard the hordes of Nazis in the streets, and these young people shout in unison, "Fuehrer, you command; we obey," then I knew where that came from: from a system where to obey without any questioning was a goal in itself.

Life in Saarbrücken

Lederer: Now I have gone a little bit ahead in the tale, but my father was in 1921 given the leading musical position in Saarbrücken, which was the main city of the Saar district. By the Treaty of Versailles it was meant to be left to a plebiscite for the people to decide in 1935 whether they wanted to belong to France or whether they wanted to belong to Germany. It is a territory rich in coal mines adjoining France, and that

brought up the question of who should benefit from its riches. But the people there were German, and they had no longing to belong to France.

When we came to Saarbrücken I was eleven, and in my young years of adolescence, the big counterweight against the dreariness of the school was to live the life of a son whose father was the chief conductor in the city. In other words, I could go to the theater any time; I could go to all the concerts. While I would by no means say that the concerts were always without boredom, for me it still was all on a level of interest and glamour because my father was the person in charge. And I can still see myself sitting there and waiting for the end of a long piece and the applause to come. [laughter]

But in the process, of course, I got very much imbued with music and with theater, and by that token also with literature and with art. We were, as a matter of course, taken to art galleries and museums, and I can still remember things that I saw when I was only nine years old--certain paintings that have stayed with me. So that was a fertile and enriching background to all my growing up, particularly, also, for the great interest in literature that I developed.

Since I had started drawing very early, my parents kept little drawings from when I was five--I guess all parents do this--but they kept them for a longer time. When I saw them at a later age, I saw that they had already something in them of a more than ordinary lively sense of observation and an ability to reproduce from observation.

Nathan: Was that spontaneous? Was there anyone who encouraged you?

Lederer: It started out being very spontaneous, but it was also very much encouraged, particularly by my father who secretly had a tremendous yearning to be a painter. I might even say that from an educational point of view, I am aware that it was much too much encouraged. In other words, natural spontaneity of development that I believe in now, was hampered by far too much observation by admiring adults, attention to what I was doing, particularly when I got a little more mature--thirteen, fourteen, fifteen.

I directed myself at such early stages for that reason, also, towards the greatest masters in the field of illustration and imitated, without any kind of understanding of what's behind it, their ways. That was something that I later on had considerable difficulty with. When people ask me

what they should do when they have talented children, I'm always inclined to say, without having studied the psychology of children's drawings, "Leave them alone. Give them pencils, give them paper, but leave them alone and don't make too much ado about it." That comes from my personal experience.

Later on, while I was still at the Gymnasium, I took some serious drawing classes which were very good, with interesting people that were stimulating, adding to my awareness of what art is all about. The last three years of Gymnasium are roughly comparable to junior college here. All this ended with a formidable examination, called Arbiturium, that took several days.

After all these nine years the school still had to find out if one had learned anything. The number of fields of study was so large that if a teacher wanted to flunk somebody, he could do that. I was in a class of seven, and only four passed the examination. It was a very cruel system. And later, when so many people who had successfully gone through this system failed to see through the follies of the Nazi doctrines, this makes me forever doubtful about accumulated knowledge as a measure of a developed mind. But once I had the examination behind me, I felt that my life started because I was liberated and could devote myself to the things that I really wanted to do. It also meant, of course, that 99 percent of what I had stuffed into my head in those years vanished within half a year.

Exhibitions: Posters, Typography

Nathan: I was thinking about the posters that advertised musical and theatrical events. Did they strike you as especially interesting when you were a child?

Lederer: Why certainly. As a matter of fact, my father managed to let me do some of them. So I designed some posters for the theatrical events--sure--again, with a great deal of innocence of what the real problems were, but he was in a position that he could push that a little bit. Whether that was right, I do not know. But in any case, I did it, and it added to my experience.

I may add here that when I was seventeen I had the good fortune to see an international exhibition of poster design that offered me a true revelation: here were artists who

conveyed a specific advertising message by images that were both striking and beautiful. This as the possible aim for an artist remained an underlying thought for myself and in my future teaching.

I remember to this day from that exhibition certain posters by Cassandre, Carlu, and Colin that I became acquainted with at that time--the three great French geniuses in the history of poster design. When I was ready to start my formal training in the arts--by now I knew the field I wanted to go into--I saw an exhibition of work of the great E.R. Weiss, one of the important figures in contemporary typography as a type and book designer.

What this exhibition revealed--which again was to me so very important--was that he showed his type design, his lettering design, his book pages, but showed also paintings, drawings, and illustrations. That was the answer to what I was looking for: I wanted to be in all these things, and not be in any way specialized. I think I had a rather down-to-earth realization that one also has to make one's living, and I wanted to practice something with which I could do that.

These two exhibitions showed to me that one can be a true artist, live up to one's highest ideals, and still do something that answers everyday needs, whether it's in posters or advertisements or in design and illustration of books. Whatever the field may be, it offers opportunities for doing things in the arts. It was strengthened by another experience. During a summer vacation in my study years I worked in Saarbrücken in the studio of an excellent young designer who at that time carried out a commission to design advertisements for the Container Corporation of America. That was my first acquaintance with that organization, whose beautiful series of advertisements was carried out by famous artists, designers, sculptors, painters, illustrators. I collected them when I came to America, and used them as inspiration, and as great examples for my students. I might add that these advertisements are also an illustration of the variety of work that so many artists did. The strict divisions that characterize the professional standards of painting, drawing, design, illustration did not yet exist. What today sets the work of the "fine artist" apart from that of the illustrator or designer, was then not known.

Nathan: You saw that the ideal and the practical parts of your interests could come together?

Lederer: That to me was a very crucial thing, because I said something at the beginning, that I never developed a sense for money or for practical things. On the other hand, I obviously had enough common sense to realize that unless you are a great genius, you cannot live on art alone, and I wanted to do something where the applied and the purely creative aspects would come together.

The field for which I felt most genuinely made was the field of book illustration. I had already started during my school years, later on, again with a rather naive disregard for problems and difficulties, to illustrate great works. These were whatever I happened to read or whatever we happened to read in school, whether it was Shakespeare or Flaubert or Dostoevsky--whatever. Some of these things I did probably were not even bad, only that, as I hinted at in the beginning, I think I started out too early with the end rather than with the beginning.

II LEIPZIG AKADEMIE; ACADÉMIE SCANDINAVE, PARIS (1931-1934)

Lederer: The choice of the school in which to make my beginning of my professional training was rather naturally given by the fact that my father's friend of early years was Hugo Steiner-Prag--an artist who also hailed from Prague. This man, one of the prominent people in the field of illustration and book arts, and typography in Germany, had in later years a great deal of influence worldwide and, at an early age, became a professor at the great Akademie in Leipzig, Germany.

Training of Artists and Crafts People

Lederer: This institution was devoted explicitly to the graphic arts, to graphic design, and to the book crafts. It combined all the arts as background to these fields, and included the training of the crafts people. So that within the building of the Akademie, a very big three-story building, people who wanted to learn how to operate powerpresses were learning side by side with the artists who gave them work to be transformed into the printed product.

As a matter of fact, there is a basic idea that to a great extent sets European and American operations apart. The crafts people in Europe were definitely design-trained. This meant that I did in Europe, later on, designs which I sketched indicating just the basics of space and arrangement, choice of type and such matters. Apart from that, the execution was left very much to the interpretation of the crafts people who came up in what they produced with exactly what I had seen in my mind's eye.

In other words, the sketch was something like an impressionistic indication much more than a meticulous blueprint. I still remember that it was even emphasized to us

in our training that we should not over-indicate because, "You are working with people who know much more about that side of their particular craft than you will ever know." That is very different from the way things are handled here, and also required a tremendous amount for me to still add to my learning when I came here.

Nathan: Do I understand then in the American system, everything is spelled out very carefully?

Lederer: Very carefully because the crafts people are trained in their craft. If they are good, they handle that superbly, but they are not prepared to make decisions in matters of taste or in matters of design. There simply is no time for that. There is no tradition for that. I do not want this to sound like a put-down on what the American crafts people are doing. I only want to explain a difference in background and what, for that reason, one could expect.

Leipzig Akademie for Graphic Arts and Book Production

Lederer: So the choice of the school was a natural one for the reason that I should go to the school where Steiner-Prag was. This, however, meant that I had to go through the institution's educational system which, in general terms, required three years of preparation before you could enter a so-called master class--in other words, before you became beholden to one particular person under whom you did then your advanced studies.

In order to be admitted at the Akademie on the basis of a submitted portfolio of work, you had to undergo an examination of one week, which consisted of doing life drawing, and the production of a poster. When you passed that, you were accepted for half a year. After that half year, you were in. That meant that while you had to, of course, go by the general principle of the education, you had a considerable amount of freedom in choices, particularly later on when you became accepted by a professor who was then your master.

In that case, you could avail yourself of the resources of the institution and--to the extent that you understood it--to use them well. But there was then no further supervision, whether you were present in class or studio or not, or whether you spent the time in the zoo drawing, or wherever. The place

was simply your place of resources, both in personnel and equipment.

Comment on Two Systems of Art Education

Lederer: Once you were accepted as a master student by a professor, you were there for as long as you saw fit to stay there. There was no formal end; there was no examination at the end or anything of that kind. If the professor wanted to write a letter of recommendation for you--fine--but nothing was in any manner formalized. I think that is something that sets it apart from other institutions of higher learning like universities, although in all other respects, it had the same ranking as a university.

Nathan: Is that out of the tradition of the atelier or artists' work in the past?

Lederer: Well, no, the atelier offered an apprentice-master relationship in the master's studio. In the art colleges in America you get degrees and have to meet unit and course requirements, whereas that German art Akademie had all kinds of stipulations connected with getting in. But once you were in, it offered a very free plan, and the manner in which you availed yourself of the opportunities offered by the institutions was entirely your own.

Nathan: Would you care to draw any judgments about these two different styles that you are describing?

Lederer: Well, it required a very adult self-reliance on the part of the student to live without this kind of guidance. Certainly when I later came to know the setup at the college in Oakland that I became connected with, it was first totally and entirely foreign to me. I was utterly bewildered by it, and the idea of grading creative work is something I never, never came to terms with. It always seemed to me in some way rather absurd to evaluate by a grading system something that is essentially a matter of quite individual judgment and preference. I coped with it, and I tried to make the best of it and to do it fairly, but I cannot say that to the end, after thirty-nine years, I felt comfortable with it. I expect I'll talk more about this later on.

Classes in Drawing, Applied Arts, Lettering

Lederer: I never made it to the point that I could avail myself of the Leipzig institution in what made it unique, because I went there only for the first two years during which I took the required preparatory classes, mainly drawing classes that were as academically rigid as anything you can imagine.

Nathan: Were these from life?

Lederer: Yes. And they were imbued in the ideal of training of the most minute observation of the surface, including many things that I actually never saw, underlying anatomy, and all that. If I tell somebody here nowadays, they just don't believe me that we actually had six days a week when the model was in one pose for four hours every morning. That meant twenty-four hours on one drawing.

There must be people who have benefitted from that. For me, it was a totally stifling experience, although I was not sufficiently clear-minded at that time and too much still imbued with the old school idea that you do as you are told, to extricate myself from that. Apart from certainly learning to observe well, it also meant a lot of just moving my hand up and down with a piece of charcoal without really anything happening.

In the afternoon we did a variety of things like learning lithography, etching, woodcut, wood engraving in its elementary steps, and beginnings of graphic design, doing book jackets, packaging, and a good deal of lettering. Lettering was a mainstay as background of all graphic design education to the same extent as it has been or is also to this day in some schools here. I know that when I came to New York, there was the Cooper Union in which some great people are taught lettering in a similar way. There they believed very strongly in the whole idea of gaining understanding of letter forms as one great source of education in form, design, meaning of what the artist can work with if he works with a given form--namely, that of the letter as we traditionally know it.

Concerts

Lederer: In addition to that, I went to an awful lot of concerts. There were the famous Gewandhaus concerts under Bruno Walter.

I do not know to what extent I would have gained if I would not have had this as a continuous distraction and preoccupation with music--in other words, if I had concentrated my whole emotional feeling more towards my chosen field. Music has always played a tremendously stimulating and absorbing role, next to art.

Certainly this was a very good time in my life with the political life, and what was brewing in Germany at that time, very much in the background.

Observing Nazi Beginnings (1931-1933)

Nathan: So this was about '31-'32?

Lederer: That was between '31 and '33.

When I had visited in Munich a few years before, I had oftentimes stopped by the publication offices where they displayed the issues of the *Der Volkische Beobachter*, the Nazi main newspaper. We read these things, and they sounded incredibly, fantastically awful, but too awful to connect with realities. That was a background. One knew about these people. One saw them, one knew some of them who were connected with these movements, but one had no contact with them.

In addition to that, our political awareness, apart from some sort of interest in newspaper reading, was always defined by the fact that an active participation did not enter our minds. Again, that belonged to the things that are really not very refined. For that reason, while we had certain preferences for leftist-liberal leanings, to be really active did not occur to us. On the other hand, when Hitler came to power, and the first little incidents happened, I became aware that there was something so sinister and despicable that I didn't want to be where that was happening.

For instance, a group of students from the Akademie took it upon themselves to simply force entry into Steiner-Prag's home (he was Jewish) where his wife was, and wanted to investigate his library for subversive literature. Well, they came in there, and they saw a library of two thousand volumes and were confounded and didn't know what to do with it, and they took their departure. The mere fact that they could do that--the affront of the attitude was so impossible that to my

mind it revealed a bent of mind with which I did not want to have anything to do.

I must say that among my colleagues with whom I studied, the mixture of reactions was between detesting, ridiculing, not taking very seriously, and all these kinds of shadings of reactions, but certainly, I had no personal unpleasant experiences whatever. My professor in drawing, who was very fond of me, was thinking in an idealistic--if one could call it that--but a befuddled way of Hitler doing something for his beloved Germany. When I had made up my mind that I didn't want to stay there, I went to him and wanted him to know what my reason was. He said, "Oh, yes. You are doing absolutely the reasonable thing. You go away for a year or two, and you come back, and everything will be evened out."

I must mention all these things because I am so very much aware that when I tell people how the beginning was, they are totally ununderstanding of why there was not a rapid exodus of everybody who was concerned. It has to be understood that all this happened in gradual steps, that life went on extremely normally for a very long time, so that even people who were Jews still did not see what was really coming. For instance, I myself being baptized, having been brought up in the Christian religion, didn't feel personally in any way endangered or affected, except that I didn't like the whole thing. That's it, and of course the vociferous anti-Semitism was part of it because I loved and respected my father. You see, the so-called Nuremberg Laws that defined Jewish ancestry by degrees, and made me a 50 percent non-Aryan, happened only later. When I left that hadn't been out yet.

But in itself, the idea of Jewishness was not part of my life. In addition to that, we lived in Saarbrücken which was not a German city at that time anyway, so I had no practical reason not to stay in Leipzig. Later on, Steiner-Prag was dismissed, and that was already a beginning of the things as they would then gradually go on.

A Chief Rabbi of Prague

Lederer: Incidentally, can I insert something here that belongs actually in the beginning?

Nathan: Oh, yes.

Lederer: The Jewishness--it was a very important tale in our youth that one of our ancestors on my father's side had been a very famous Chief Rabbi of Prague in the early nineteenth century. There were stories that he came from Rumania and had to flee his congregations there because he was too liberal, and that they poisoned his wells, and other stories of that kind.

But the nicest story that we often heard, and it's quite colorful, is that when he died, the Archbishop of Prague came to the funeral in the golden calèche drawn by six white horses. That's a wonderful story. As a matter of fact, I later on even saw that golden calèche in action at a big Catholic Eucharistic Congress in 1934 where the Archbishop of Prague together with the Archbishop of Paris rode to the big main city square where they held mass. Well, that's really an aside, but I think the Rabbi Rapoport belongs in this story. I will show you a picture of him later on.

Leaving Germany

Nathan: Good. What made you decide that you had had enough of school?

Lederer: I didn't have enough of the school. I had enough of the prevailing atmosphere of Germany. I did not want to be where these things went on, where students in the same school where I went to had had the affront to go and break into the house of a friend--the whole thing. I went to a concert, to the Gewandhaus, and I found the door was closed, and in front of it stood the conductor Bruno Walter in conference with certain people because they didn't let him go in and conduct his concert any more. Things of that kind.

Hitler visited the city at one point, and to see and hear these masses and masses of people *Heiling* and shouting and venerating this person who was to me the epitome of the lowest kind of a human being that one could imagine, and all the others around him and these Storm Troopers. Everything that they did and stood for and acted in was emotionally despicable to me long before really awful things happened.

Painting in Paris

Lederer: I did not leave the school; I left Germany. When I went to Saarbrücken, I went to a place that was not touched by this thing yet, being the capital of a territory that had been set apart, but I made my study area first in Paris because I was through with a preparatory schedule of drawing at the Akademie which was meant to be followed by one year of painting. Paris, being close to Saarbrücken, seemed to be a good place to study painting. So I went there and enrolled in a school, the Académie Scandinave, where the painting teacher was a great painter, Othon Friesz, one of the early members of the Fauves, a very great painter, a great personality. The San Francisco Museum of Art owns one of his paintings.

When I started painting there at that private school, you attended a class, and you painted the whole week. On Friday the great man made an appearance for an hour or two and went from easel to easel and spread the gospel. When he came in and looked at my things, I knew that what I was doing was far, far below the level of a man of his ken. I was not a painter in the true sense. So after a few such experiences, I quit. The last session I had there was when I had painted, the whole week, a large nude, and Mr. Friesz pointed to a little speck on the side of a thigh and said, "C'est pas mal." That did it. [laughter]

The Experience of Paris

Lederer: I saw the light, but it was wholesome because it finished this whole area for me. I knew that I was not a painter, that I had to direct myself towards other things in the arts. I used the time in Paris to best advantage, by simply drawing in the streets and in the parks. I spent an endless amount of time in the Louvre studying paintings, making drawings from paintings, and somehow used the whole wonderful experience of Paris as a watershed to loosen up again, to forget about all this academically built-up encroachment on my mind.

I think one cannot be a person with eyes without seeing Paris as a tremendous experience. The light, the structure, the rhythm of the city, the way things are placed in Paris taught me that it sometimes does not matter whether a building is good or not so good. I don't think the Paris Opera is a

very great piece of architecture, but the way it stands there is magnificent, and that goes for everything in Paris.

I tried to think whether there were any special exhibitions in Paris; I cannot recall a single one in particular. The whole city of Paris was a great exhibition of art for me.

So I think what must filter through to your mind by simply walking those streets and imbuing yourself with the rhythm and the proportions of all the buildings, is in itself a tremendous education for any visually minded person, in addition to experiencing what the light in Paris does in tying colors together--what color harmonies are doing. In Paris you don't see anything that is jarring in spite of the greatest amount of contrasts. So I was very, very enriched by this experience, although I lived a very restricted life because it was much more expensive there to live, and my father had to support that.

Nathan: So you were a poor young artist in Paris?

Lederer: Well, I don't want to over-dramatize that, but I wasn't affluent by any means. I certainly did not starve, although I did not eat too well, either. [laughter]

Nathan: I see. Well, that was a good balance.

Nazis and Normalcy

Nathan: Were you aware of any political unease in Paris at the time?

Lederer: No, I was not aware of anything. I know that I was there at the time of the Daladier uprisings, and there were shootings on the Place de la Concorde. I found that very upsetting but yet, it did not then affect me personally. Meanwhile, I read about the crescendo of terrible things happening in Germany, but I must always emphasize that all that still went under some kind of umbrella of normalcy that made the full impact of what was later to come--I speak now about the Holocaust--really not evident.

Somehow there was in most people too much ingrained the thought or the sense that the Germans are a civilized people:

that cannot happen there. In Leipzig there was a brother of my mother's in whose house I visited. They were nice to me. At one time there was a birthday party, and there was a birthday cake, and on top of that was a Hitler figure like the couple on a wedding cake.

Nathan: How bizarre.

Lederer: Things of that kind. These were, after all, my uncle and my cousins. One cousin of mine, when I finally left, put his arm around my shoulder and said, "I can understand so well how you must feel with this being called Jewish now, and I know that I wanted to enter the students' duelling fraternity (you know these battling students in Germany), and I was rejected there. I can, for that reason, fully understand how you feel about that." Well, I could only tell him, "This is a little bit different." [laughter]

III HUGO STEINER-PRAG AND OFFICINA PRAGENSIS (1934-1936)

Nathan: You were in Paris from '33 to '34. Then you went to Prague?

Lederer: Then I went to Prague because in the meanwhile, Hugo Steiner-Prag, who as a young man had added the German spelling of the word "Prague" to his birth name of Hugo Steiner, had gone back to that city to which he was as an artist very much beholden. Images of the old Prague play a role in all his work and have remained a background to all the illustrative work that he has done. He was a highly erudite, skillful, imaginative personality, and interestingly enough in two quite different fields.

Steiner-Prag's Multiple Abilities

Lederer: In one way, he was an illustrator with a great deal of leaning towards the fantastic, the in-between world of dreams and mystery. When the Limited Editions Club of New York commissioned him to select one work of Shakespeare for a series of illustrations, each being done by a different world-renowned illustrator, he selected *Measure for Measure* because the setting there is Vienna. He simply changed that Vienna to Prague, the opposite thing that happened in the *Amadeus* movie where Prague was represented by Vienna.

At the same time, he was highly inventive and skillful in controlled design. Very inventive decorative design was used on book covers, book bindings, and title pages. His work included, of course, also typography and lettering. With a great sense for literature, and love for books, he became one of the most prominent people in book design; he also did a great deal of work as designer for the stage.

And lastly, being a man of a highly developed sense of management, he arranged and organized international exhibits of book arts, both in Leipzig and later on also in Prague. They have become landmarks in the history of book design. So I have to talk at some length about him. He is not as well known in America now, because there are other names that have come more into the foreground. On the other hand, he ended his life in the United States. He has a permanent place at the Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey that has a Steiner-Prag room with a collection of his work and writings.

His work was shown, after his death in San Francisco, at the deYoung Museum and the School of Fine Arts. At that time, I gave talks about his work at the museum and at a number of other places. But I am going a little ahead of myself there.

In any case, when he had to leave Germany, he managed to create an organization of backers in Prague for a school to be called Officina Pragensis, which was to be guided by principles and directions very much like his classes at the Akademie in Leipzig. It was natural for me to become his student there. The city of Prague is a wonderful old town. Below the Hradsin castle, which is located on a hill overlooking the city, he installed his school in a seventeenth century mansion. In addition to its location, the school offered the stimulation of students from two contrasting cultures living there side by side: the strong, vital, earthy one of the Czechs and Slovaks, and that of the Czechoslovakian Germans with their rich traditions of the old Austrian Empire.

As an organizational feat, this was unsurpassable, as he had come without any money, had gotten the people to back his plans, promising them a collection of lithographic prints, and projecting that this venture would be of great interest for the graphic arts in Czechoslovakia. Fortunately, he knew from his youth some Czech language, sufficient for him to make his points and to talk to the Czech people, and of course could talk to the German population from the old Austrian Empire there.

Graphic Arts in Czechoslovakia

Nathan: Had Czechoslovakia been a center for fine printing and book publishing?

Lederer: Yes, Czechoslovakia had an excellent arts and crafts school and has always had, as a matter of fact, a very forward-looking kind of graphic design attitude which is very original and very alive and unfettered by over-much emphasis on tradition. The Czechs had a certain kind of freshness and youthfulness in what they were doing, and some wonderful illustrators like Cyril Bouda and Karel Svolinsky were active there. I admired them very much. Only it was all of a comparatively small scope. After all, Czechoslovakia was not a huge nation, but the vitality of the Czechs as a people was very impressive.

Prague, apart from being a beautiful city with a wealth of mostly eighteenth century Baroque buildings, holds part of the city that is kept in the old style. That alone is a wonderful experience. What also added of course to the vitality--and that also appeared then later on in that school--was the confluence of cultures: this young Czech-Slovak culture which under the Austrian Empire had been very much under the thumb and that now came very much forward, and the rich German tradition of the Austrian Empire that was still alive there. The life together of people from such different backgrounds of cultures made for an unusual mix of cultures in that city.

It is one of the tragic ironies that the many German Jews in Prague who were so totally and entirely beholden to the German culture and maintained that German tradition against the powerful youthfulness of the "now in the saddle" Czechs, were later on driven out or annihilated by the Germans.

Well, I started at that school into which, of course, Steiner-Prag put in considerably more time attending to his classes than he did at the Akademie in Leipzig. I think even there he visited his class every day when he was there, but having so many other activities, he, of course, oftentimes was not in town. That was not something that was in any particular way regulated; it was entirely up to whoever was in charge of those master classes in Leipzig how much time to give to students. In Prague he fully devoted himself to this very small group of students, among whom I had the flattering role as being the best.

A Teacher's Insight

Lederer: I flourished under that, and what, of course, I also blossomed under was this artist-teacher's insight in what was hidden in a person. He had a sense for people that was uncanny, and made it tremendously interesting in later years to also discuss the students and their foibles, their ways and their talents, and how he managed to distill from the bent of the talents the area in which they could be most constructive for themselves in whatever field they were.

He helped me considerably. I had come from Paris with heaps of sketches, and he showed me how I could translate what I had done into book jackets or wrapping paper, stationery boxes, or whatever it might be. To me this was a wonderful revelation. Suddenly I knew where to go, what to do, where I belonged. That experience is what has shaped me. I have to talk so much about the man because in the development of my profession I modeled myself entirely after him. This is what I wanted to do: this is what I wanted to be, whatever differences in talent and temperament there were.

This made for me for a wonderful time, also being surrounded by so many people, young or old, with whom I felt entirely at ease. I flourished there; I loved the city. If there is any place in Europe to which I feel I have a sense of belonging, it's only Prague. However, when I visited there a single time after the war, I found the city only a beautiful shell; the appearance was unchanged but the spirit and the people I had known there were gone.

Good Work and Decent Work

Lederer: So what can we talk more about the school? Well, everything in the school was dedicated to doing good work. There also enters something that may warrant expanding. To do good work meant to a great extent also doing decent work. That means work to which you bring everything that you can by way of what you put in and nothing left to be handled, well, haphazardly. In other words, to do shoddy lettering or not well-spaced lettering, that really was looked upon as some sort of a moral slight. You have let your craft down. Things of that kind were not tolerated.

Now in Europe, a teacher in such an art school was blunt. We were not coddled. We were not being told every second time that we got together that we were really great geniuses, or that we have something to offer that would set the world agog. If occasionally the word, "it's good, it's well-done," would fall, it was pretty nice. But if something was done casually, not as good as you possibly could do it, you certainly got to hear that. That is an approach that I could not use later in my teaching in America. Students are simply not used to that kind of attitude and are generally very much used to and in need of support.

In a European school you simply had to have enough confidence in yourself. Otherwise you could be very much annihilated by what you were told at times. I know that I at one time in Leipzig went to Steiner-Prag with my life drawings. He looked at one and pointed to a knee, and said, "That knee is inexcusably lazily drawn." That sure got me down.

When he started that school, he did all the teaching, and he had one young woman who assisted him, and that was it.

Assistant to Steiner-Prag

Lederer: In the second year when I was there, she wasn't there any more, and so he appointed me to be his assistant, which meant that I helped with the routine kind of teaching or supervising or being available to answer basic questions. By that time, after a year of intensive work with him, I really understood the basic things pretty well. Having been so interested in what he was doing in that respect, also observant, I had picked up a good deal. In addition to that, he wanted to offer drawing, too, and he gave that to me as something to teach.

Nathan: Were there more students coming?

Lederer: Oh, yes, there were more students coming in, but still the school could only be so large due to its physical limitations, so that I think at one point, when it reached something like thirty, it was really crowded. That happened later on. At the beginning, he tried to keep it reasonably compact.

The Saar Vote and Family's Experience (1935)

Lederer: Now in January '35, the Saar district was given a chance to vote and voted for Germany, which meant that my father, as a Jew, lost his position. That indirectly meant for me that there was no financial support coming any more, and so I moved into the school which was not terribly "ritzy," as there was a couch for me somewhere in the school that at night was transformed into a bed. That was the place where I lived, but I could stay with Steiner-Prag, who had a little ménage with his wife adjoining the school. I earned a little bit here and there, but essentially it was very limited.

In order to tell the story of the Nazis, there is a very, very odd situation to be told if you want this to be part of this tale which is reflected in what happened to my father. My father had been sent to the Saar district in order to, as the newspapers called it all the time, help uphold the German culture there. That he had done this very well had been touted in the newspapers all over all the time. When Hitler came to the Saar district, my father was retired. He was retired according to the letter of the law. His pension was paid to the last day of the Nazi Reich every month in Germany.

In other words, there is a story that totally contradicts all the things that happened ordinarily, and it is these kinds of absurdities, you might almost call them that, which saved my father's life. He moved then, in order to be somewhere where he would not be known, to Berlin with my mother and younger brother and lived in a very unnoticed life. He was known by only a few people and lived through this whole horrid period where his friends, right and left, vanished--where you never knew whether that knock on the door would come in the night. Later on came the knocks of the bombs. Through all this, he survived.

At the very end in 1945, he was arrested and was taken away for interrogation. At that moment, my mother used a means that we knew about that was available: that was the personality of the famous conductor Furtwängler who had been his colleague in Mannheim, had remained on friendship terms with him through the years, and had a highly influential position in Germany. He had said at the beginning of the Nazi period: "If anything happens, let me know." So my mother went to him, and whatever he did, I do not know. But after a day or two, my father was free.

So that ended that story. I should add to it that I saw my father ten years later, and at that time he was close to eighty. My mother had died a few years earlier. We did not feel inclined to revive all these past events, so a lot of details of how it actually all went, how my father's rescue came about, I do not even know, and I never asked about it. Thinking about these interviews, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to know more details. There is also a book in which some of these things are described. It's a book about Furtwängler himself,[1] showing that he did certain things to help Jewish people and used his authority to that avail. Shortly after this event, the war ended. My father was made a professor at the conservatory and had still ten good years of being professor, conducting opera and concerts.

Nathan: I see. You suggested that you might want to say something about your younger brother?

Lederer: My younger brother, Johannes, did not have a chance to go to university because by the time he made his final exam at the school, Hitler came. He stayed with my parents in Germany and worked as a sales clerk, and after the war became an insurance agent. He is a very talented photographer who in later years had quite a bit of success as a photographer. He was not persecuted during the Hitler years except for the end when he was shipped to somewhere in Belgium for forced labor. He had very unpleasant experiences there and even after the war, when he was imprisoned by the Belgians as a German, as was my older brother Felix in Italy, where he had survived the war years. Details are not known to me, and, somehow, in the bliss of seeing each other again after difficult years, they were not being delved into. For that reason I cannot be more explicit about them, but all these tales belong to what I can only call absurdities and inconsistencies of the Nazi years and of the war.

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[1]Daniel Gillis, Furtwängler and America (Woodhaven, New York: Manyland Books, Inc., 1970), pp.37-38, 117.

IV VIENNA, AND A PROFESSION

Lederer: After two years in Prague ('34-'35), I realized when I was ready to really get going professionally, that with a quite rudimentary knowledge of the Czech language and the narrowness of the total field there anyway, my chances to make a real go in Prague were very limited. I had picked up some work here and there but still to make a living was another story, and certainly to be assistant at the school could not support me.

So I ventured to Vienna, Austria.

Finding Book Publishers

Nathan: Was this in 1935?

Lederer: That was in 1936, and I found there a good number of publishers who gave me work. Most of all, there were two prominent German publishers who had emigrated and established themselves with offices in Vienna with their authors as background and with all their experiences. One was Fischer--the great publisher from Berlin of Thomas Mann as one of my famous authors.

The other German publisher was Piper from Munich who had not only published books but also the most beautiful art reproductions made in Germany, which he could not continue in Vienna, but he continued to publish books. He gave me everything that he had, to do, so I had a really good field for myself there working for these well-known publishers and other established Austrian publishers. I was quite successful and really doing the things that I wanted to do, which was mostly work in connection with books.

Nathan: Did you have a studio of your own?

Lederer: Well, studio is a little bit too big a term for what I had. I had a furnished room in which I lived and worked. The work in Austria was paid very, very skimpily. The Austrian publishers had very limited outlets and those from Germany, being emigrants themselves, had hardly had time to establish themselves and certainly could not work on a grand scale, so the income level was very, very small and was only sufficient to just sustain myself. But it was the kind of work I wanted to do; it offered experience; it was a chance to do something with what I had learned.

A One-Man Show

Lederer: It certainly was a time in which whatever talents I have, had an outlet, and that in itself was certainly very, very good. In addition to that, there was a very fine antiquarian bookstore, Heck, on the famous Kärtner Ring (the circle of streets surrounding the inner city of Vienna--former city walls) that had also an art gallery. They gave me a one-man show. I exhibited my watercolors and drawings of Prague, and some of my illustrations.

In connection with thinking of these interviews, I pulled out these reviews I got in the Vienna papers, and got quite conceited about what they all wrote about my work at that time. [laughter] Really it was amazing--the repercussion that I had at that time, which helped me very much because I had already been spoiled a little bit, having been the prodigy student at the school in Prague. When the school had its exhibits, the papers also always mentioned my name in a very special way. So all that was certainly very, very nice for me.

A Meeting, and Hitler in Austria

Lederer: Another very important thing happened there: I met my future wife, Hanni, there at a swimming party. We were not thinking of marriage at that time, but certainly had a profound interest in each other. We were together during whatever time remained in Vienna for me, but the time was abruptly cut short by Hitler's takeover of Austria. In March of this year (1988) we "celebrated" the fiftieth anniversary of that event.

Reviews--translated by
Wolfgang Lederer

Exhibition Wolfgang Lederer, Vienna 1937

The 15th exhibition of the Cabinet of Graphic Art V.A.Heck is given to the work of the painter and book artist Wolfgang Lederer, who, as a student of Professor Hugo Steiner-Prag, first attended the Academy of Graphic Arts in Leipzig and who followed his teacher to Prague, after studies with Othon Friesz in Paris. The emphasis of the studies with Steiner-Prag, the complete freedom in painterly handling,combined with high control in all matters of book production, can be sensed also in the work of Lederer, who presents his work here for the first time showing his numerous Viennese watercolors, brush and pen-and-ink drawings, illustrations and book jackets. His fine sensitivity allows him to find the right tone for very differing themes in the work of Dickens, Flaubert and Brentano. His scenes of the life in the streets of Paris are so keenly observed and well rendered that we understand why numerous Viennese publishers (Tal, Bastei) have commissioned work from the young artist. As charming designs of Christmas papers indicate, he is ~~xeik~~ able to work equally well also in other areas of applied arts. In any case, this successful introduction forbodes well for Lederer's future activities in Vienna.

Signed: Dr. H.A.-K. Wiener Tageblatt.

Wolfgang Lederer, who since one year lives in Vienna is only 25 yars old; however, he is already well known abroad and introduces himself here with an exhibition of watercolors, drawings and book art at the Heck Gallery. The former student at the Academy of Graphic Arts in Leipzig, with Othon Friesz in Paris, and with Hugo Steiner-Prag in Prague, where he later taught at the Officina Pragensis, is more than successful in this endeavor. One gets to know him in his coloristically strong watercolors

of landscapes and flowers, his quickly but assuredly drawn sketches of life in Parisian streets and theatres, in studies of all kinds in applied graphic, as well as in his sensitive illustrations for Dickens and Flaubert, as well as in bookjackets that meet all high demands as art while serving as an eye catch. What one senses strongly in Lederer's work and what one enjoys is a real talent for graphics happily combined with a taste that can never be acquired, only cultivated.

Volkszeitung, Nov. 15/37

One-man show Wolfgang Lederer, Cabinet of Graphic Art, V.A. Heck

Wolfgang Lederer has been working for a year in Vienna. He has created for many publishers in Vienna very charming book covers and jackets. He has a solid background in drawing combined with a fine musicality of lines and colors a cultured taste and the imagination of the born illustrator, who tells his stories with effortless grace and achieves always suggestive resultsx - be they spooky or cheerful. The onlooker can enjoy beautiful flowerpieces, watercolors such as dance rehearsal or street scenes of Paris and Prague. He is at his best in illustrations for David Copperfield and Madame Bovary, calling for big comissions as incentive for greatest development.
Occasionally a sense for elegance and beauty is evident - not often found among talents now-a-days. On his watercolors of flowers, painterly delicate and loosely handled, his art betrays a fine understanding of outlines and overlaps. The promising start of an artist's career!

Neue Freie Presse, Vienna

On that day, I had packed my suitcase at night, having decided to leave Austria quickly and go back to Prague where I knew at least there was the couch in that school where I could put myself down on. Again, like before in Germany, it was only a very strong instinct that compelled me not to wait any longer. As a matter of fact, I left by streetcar, which is almost a joke, because nobody else thought of it: I knew of a car line that went to the border and just across the border to Czechoslovakia. That made for the fact that when I got there I could tell the Nazi guards at the border that I wanted to meet an old study friend from Prague, and that we wanted to paint here. That was it, and let me get out there. If I had gone by train, I might have had considerably more difficulty with experienced border guards.

To Prague, and an Affidavit for America

Nathan: You had just one suitcase?

Lederer: I had just my suitcase with a few belongings there. What books or other things I owned, I left behind. So I was back in Prague and back at the school, and I had to see what to do next. What next in my mind was America. I had heard about America being a wonderful place from a woman who had a fine school in Vienna in the great tradition of the Viennese school of design. Her name was Emmy Zweybrück.

Working for the American Crayon Company, she spent every several months of the year in the United States, promoting the products of the American Crayon Company by giving demonstrations and courses in schools all over the United States. She had described America to me as a place where things move on and are not so encumbered and difficult as in Europe. That was the first inkling I had that America could offer opportunities to me.

I wrote letters asking for help to my relatives--they lived by that time in New York--and I got a "nay," nothing doing. I wrote to others, and I don't want to mention names now, two close friends of the family, and I each time got a "no."

Nathan: What were you asking of them?

Lederer: An affidavit. What people do not understand--they wonder why Jews stayed in Germany or Austria. It was because nowhere did

you get a permit to work. All these years when I was in Paris, when I was in Prague, when I was in Vienna, I was always registered as a student. I never worked in the open. You asked whether I had a studio in Vienna; I was very careful not to hang out my shingle. That was part of the whole story. As a "student" I could live there; but as a foreigner, you were not permitted to make your living there.

Nathan: An affidavit would have said--

Lederer: An affidavit would say that the person giving it warrants that I will not become a burden to the United States, and it meant some kind of financial obligation because we were not permitted to take money out of Europe. So some financial help had to be given. Even if I would take immediately a job as dishwasher, I still would have to spend a few days living there without income. It's an obligation. The people I wrote to didn't want me to live there as a dishwasher and have the feeling that they are heels because they let me do that. They rather said the safe thing: "No."

It's also an indication--because these families were Jews--that they really did not see the extent of the real danger, and in the meanwhile the impossibility for me to do my work in Germany. If I had not gotten out, I could have worked there in some kind of a lowly position just like my younger brother who stayed there and worked in a shop as file clerk. But I certainly could never have worked in my field. So I got these three "nos."

In the meanwhile, Steiner-Prag had been invited by a group of Swedes, who had staged an exhibit of Swedish book art in Prague just around that time, to come to Sweden, to Stockholm, to start a school similar to the Officina Pragensis in Stockholm. So during that time when I was back in Prague, Hugo Steiner-Prag went to Stockholm in order to arrange things there--to talk to these people, to organize things, to get that thing going there. I was in charge of the Officina Pragensis.

So, for once, I was really "the school." I admitted the students and did all the teaching, and at that time they flocked in because there were people who realized that this Nazi thing was approaching Czechoslovakia more and more--like, for example, a Jewish architect who wanted to learn something about graphic design because he thought of emigration to America. So the school was very, very full, and I was earning quite well because I even took over some of the commissions

that Steiner-Prag could not take on himself while he was in Sweden.

I must say--and again, it's contradictory to what was happening in the world and what was happening to many of my friends left back in Vienna--I had a good time because it was a very active time for me. I also assiduously kept away from occupying myself continuously with the dangerous aspects and with these terrible stories that were floating around out of Austria and Germany. I tried to shy away from them because I knew I had to keep my sanity.

Hitler in Prague, and Time to Leave

Lederer: I needed all my sanity because by the time Hugo Steiner-Prag had established himself then in Stockholm, Hitler came to Prague. So after Germany and Austria this was the third time that I was confronted with him and saw him there. As a matter of fact, it was a rather spooky sort of scene. Hitler, whom I had seen in Leipzig before, even at very close range as the subject of wild adulation by masses of people--I saw now from the window in the school riding in an open car. Before his coming the loudspeakers in cars with Nazis in them had broadcast, "Make the streets free, the Fuehrer is coming." Well, the Czechs took that very literally. There was not a person in the streets. There was a big city square in front of the school, where I can still see that car with Hitler in it driving over that square with one lonely Nazi standing there, saluting him and being saluted back by Hitler. No masses of raised arms--nothing of that kind.

Choosing America

Lederer: In any case, I was caught inside a territory annexed by the Nazis. But there came an invitation from Steiner-Prag to go to Stockholm to work with him there and help him in the school--very inviting, familiar ground. But almost at the same time, a relative of my mother's--that means, of course, a non-Jewish relative--a person whom she had never before been in touch with, responded with, "yes": he would give me the affidavit.

Nathan: Oh, what a choice.

Lederer: Yes, it was a horrible choice to make. I made the right one, thank God. I decided I had had it with Europe, and I would take the chance. I mean: I know nothing about America, but I take my chance. That's the risk I take. So after many, many sleepless nights, this is the decision that I made, and fortunately it worked out.

So I packed my things, but now came another difficulty, and the difficulty was that I had to leave Czechoslovakia via Germany because that was the only way I could get out. I couldn't go via Russia; that was closed. Somewhere I had to get out, and I decided I would leave from Italy by an Italian boat. There were no airplanes to America at that time, of course.

So I had to go to the by now German authorities in Prague to say that I want to leave Czechoslovakia. That meant--now comes the greatest irony--that I had to break myself out of the obligation to serve in the German army. So I went to the German Nazi Commander's office, where I found a crowd of people there asking for the same thing. A loudspeaker was announcing that anybody who was non-Aryan should simply go away; no point to apply. I disregarded that. I went in with my passport which I had prepared the night before, all night long, transforming it into an old battered passport. I had glued together the two pages which had the visa from the American consulate for immigration, so that I could simply say, "I'm leaving Czechoslovakia because I'm through with my studies there. I'm going back to Germany."

That ruse worked, but it's a story that even today is still difficult for me to tell because, I mean, he flipped page by page--and the two critical pages stuck. So that part worked, but there were more difficulties still to come.

Nathan: Did you need a visa for the United States?

Lederer: Of course. And the American consul was not a helpful person. He made it incredibly difficult for the people who were applying for visas there. Among other things, he required it to be paid in American dollars, which were not for anything to be had in Prague at that time. I happened to have saved them from sales that Emmy Zweybrück had made for me in America of a design for Christmas cards. For some quirk of a reason I had kept some dollars, and so I could pay for my visa.

The van Loon Letter

Lederer: But the other thing was that the relative who had given me the affidavit, who was a Wall Street millionaire, staunchly refused to divulge his tax statements which were needed for a legitimate visa. At that moment, I was fortunate that Hendrik van Loon, who was a very well-known American writer, had seen in London my illustrations for a book that an emigrated Vienna publisher had wanted to bring out. *Songs We Sing in Vienna* was meant to be something with German and English text that would allow the travelers from abroad to follow these songs that were sung in the famous wine taverns in Vienna.

Well, Hendrik van Loon liked these illustrations so much that he thought, "I want to do something for that man," and wrote spontaneously, unasked for, a letter to the consul, telling him what a great asset I would be for America. The publisher had written to me that the letter is at the consul's. So I sent a note to the consul, saying, you have that letter from Hendrik van Loon and so on. It did the trick. I got the visa.

Nathan: Do you have any notion of why the consul was so unhelpful?

Lederer: People said he was just nasty. I have heard similar stories again just recently in another connection where a consul was so terribly uncooperative. It was very, very unpleasant. But you know in this situation, you become terribly selfish. I did not pay attention to what was going on around me. It was only just that: I have to get out. Anything that helps me get out--I cannot pay attention to the tragedies around me. It's very selfish. I am amazed about it in rethinking or reliving it to what extent that was the case.

Well, the story is not entirely ended. I did not know whether I really would get out because I had had unpleasantness at the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany, where they examined my passport. When we came to the border between Austria and Italy--beautiful in the mountains, I have been there twice since traveling--I was taken out of the train by two police officers and was interrogated for two hours. I answered all questions--that was early in the morning at 4 o'clock--and in the end the men asked me, "But you don't have the military permission," which, of course, I didn't have. For some quirky reason, I had kept in my pocket the permission to leave Czechoslovakia which had the German military stamp on it. It had nothing to do with getting free from military service, but it had a military stamp on it. He

looked at it and took it for the permit he had asked for. So it was a narrow escape. And that's how I got to the United States--almost.

When I came to the ship in Genoa, the officer said, "But you don't have the permit to enter Italy." [laughter] Because in my glee to be rid of that interrogation, at the border, I simply had run across the railroad tracks. There was a little choo-choo train that was just leaving to go across the border. I didn't want to wait for anything else. I jumped in there, but there was no passport examination anymore. So I never had gotten the permit stamp to enter Italy.

Well, the officer on the boat was a nice Italian. I threw myself on his mercy, and he let me go. I was on the boat, and so I sailed with *The Rex* in eleven days and arrived somewhat seasick but otherwise well enough for wear and tear with $8 in New York. Ten dollars were all I was permitted to take out, and $2 I had given to the steward. I had seen the towers of Manhattan appear in the morning mist and was met at the dock by my friendly savior-relative. That was in May of 1939.

V GETTING STARTED IN AMERICA (1939)

[Interview 2: May 23, 1988]

Lederer: I think last time we ended just when I arrived in America and Manhattan and was received there by my sponsor, who was fortunately a very wealthy man, and for that reason put me up in a pleasant place and handed me some money. His help was something I simply had to accept. I cannot say that I liked that very much, and I tried certainly to get out of the situation as fast as I possibly could, but it took about seven to eight weeks before I could tell him that I had found enough work to be on my own.

His help enabled me from the beginning to devote myself to looking for work in my line, in which however I was considerably handicapped by my very rudimentary English. I had tried in the last weeks in Prague to study English, and I could read it, but could speak it only a little. It certainly was not enough to make a convincing presentation of myself, most of all, not convincing to anybody who would want me to handle a manuscript as a basis for a book or jacket design.

Looking for Work

Lederer: So I had to be patient, and I simply walked the streets from one publisher to another, after I had first gone to a bookstore and looked up names of publishers, in addition to the few I knew. I simply went to everybody and showed them my work in a portfolio.

These interviews were invariably pleasant. It was one of my great early experiences in America that people were so incredibly nice. Obviously they realized that the situation in which I was, was not exactly easy, and they certainly

helped me overcome any awkwardness of the situation by their pleasant attitude. It didn't mean that they gave me work, but their attitude carried with it a good spirit that took away any sense of being discouraged. I have remained appreciative of that, and aware of it to this day. After each visit I left with a long list of names that I had been given of people whom I should look up, which I did. Sometimes in glancing down from a window in the skyscrapers of Manhattan, I saw all those masses of people on the street, and ever so often among them someone with that typical black square designer's portfolio: another person looking for my kind of work. By the way, I decided then to break that portfolio monotony and made for myself a small handy one with a bright red cover. Its appearance was greeted by many of the people I called on with: "Oh, that looks nice already"--a good start for a review of my work.

The reaction to my work was always pleasantly positive, but in some way hesitant. Many of the people came back to me with the reaction, looking at my European work, saying, "Well, that's of course what I would love to do, but we cannot do that here." That kind of attitude was somewhat difficult for me to take. If they said, "That's what I would love to do," I wanted to say, "Well, here I am; why don't you do it?" But that was not the next thing that they would say. The next thing was, "But we cannot do it here." Maybe my work appeared to be too subtle.

One thing that I found out in my contact with publishers was an amazing and, to my way of thinking, totally unwarranted, exaggerated respect for everything European. This is something that World War II changed radically. The whole attitude in America towards Europe in my observation has changed considerably, and this feeling that we are here playing maybe second fiddle to Europe has vanished.

Dale Carnegie's Advice

Lederer: I was also maybe helped in this job-seeking situation by understanding their dilemma, which was that they liked my work but did not know whether working with someone who had only European experience and insufficient knowledge of English, would not turn out to be troublesome. It may have been helpful for me that by chance the last book that I had designed in Europe, in Prague for a Swiss publisher, was a German language translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win*

Friends and Influence People. It was offered there with a slightly tongue-in-cheek attitude as a somewhat amusing text. But I read it, and found in it a basic good wisdom: the wisdom of approaching people not by trying to impose oneself with one's problems on them, but to understand that they too have problems.

Maybe realizing that the people on whom I called were also in a fix created a certain rapport. It helped, of course, that I did not have that sense of desperation that other less fortunate people had, who, unless they got a job, would be sitting on the street and starving. So I can only describe this experience as interesting because I met all kinds of people, and also a positive one, and very much a learning experience. I will never forget that I arrived on a Saturday afternoon. And on Monday I made my first visit, by coincidence, to a newspaper man indirectly connected with book publishing. I came to that office, and the man put his feet on the desk and kept his hat on. So I knew that I was in America because that's the way I had seen it in the movies. [laughter]

Nathan: But you did not put your feet on the desk?

Lederer: I did not. No.

The work I got at early stages was of all kinds, but I remember only one that really had nothing to do with what my profession is. It was simply that I was recommended as somebody who can read German and somehow get it over into English, and I was asked to do, from some German special journals, translations for a research project on the sex life of fish.

So I went to the Museum of Natural History and waded through German journals on fish life, and whenever there was anything about their particular sex life, I took that and translated it. But apart from that, everything that I did was connected with my abilities or skills in doing art work of some kind, which also included a stint of doing retouch on photographs.

Independence

Lederer: In any case, all this led to being able after eight weeks to tell my sponsor, "I don't need any further support." I moved

out of the place where he had put me up, which was some kind of a young people's home where I could have contact with other young people. As a matter of fact, they put up a little exhibit there of my watercolors, and when I found that two of them had been stolen, in my very optimistic frame of mind, I took that as a very good sign: people in America are really interested in what I am doing. [laughter]

I think I can hardly convey this unbelievable sense of elation, of positiveness, of simply being here--to have made it. With that even all kinds of shortcomings really did not play a great role.

A Room Near the Elevated

Lederer: I moved then into a typical narrow brownstone house on the west side of New York, on 94th Avenue, close to Broadway, and near the Elevated. I had a tiny room that looked into the backyards, on the third floor, not realizing when I took it that under the roofs of New York, this was a hothouse in the summer--broiling. I shared that floor on which I was with two other people--one an old, somewhat deranged lady and the other one a young lady that somebody had put there to entertain himself with. And for us three there was a little bathroom with a trickle of a shower, and that was it--and lots of cockroaches.

So it was not terribly elegant, but it was adequate, and it was private. Nobody bothered what I was doing there, and that was in itself much already, much better than the situation, for instance, in Vienna, where I had rented a room inside of an apartment of people who snooped into my private life. I thought this privacy was absolutely wonderful. Luckily, since the telephone was on the ground floor, the landlady was a very intelligent person, and the messages I got from some of my professional contacts were handled extremely well by her. I always thought that people who called must think I have a fabulous office with a topnotch secretary. It sure was very far from that.

Nathan: Would you care to say the name of your sponsor?

Lederer: Yes. His name was Thomas Smith. He was very good and generous to me, but he never invited me to his house. A few times he took me out for lunch, which meant a more substantial repast than my 25-cent cafeteria fare. It also meant that he

had me precede lunch with one or two Manhattans, which, on an empty stomach, provided another extraordinary New World experience for me. Mr. Smith died within the first year after my arrival in New York. I don't even want to think of what would have been my fate had he died a year earlier.

Nathan: Yes. You are now in your little room. Could you work? Did you have a table?

Lederer: Yes. I had a table which was somewhat rickety, but it was all right, and my kind of work does not require very much space. I had to organize it well and somehow manage it, but it was all right. The one window of this little narrow room gave me enough light, I could do my work, and it was quiet. It's all I needed for my satisfaction.

First Job: Package Design

Lederer: The first job that I landed was with a French printing firm, Makowski, that did exquisite specialized kinds of printing. It was particularly geared to either the deep-embossed or debossed kind of treatment of paper in printing--very much suited for very elegant work. This French printing firm established an office and studio in Manhattan with the idea in mind to use that studio as a come-on for the big cosmetic firms: Elizabeth Arden, Charles of the Ritz, and others to have special package designs created. Accepted designs were sent over to France for printing and production.

There was a chief designer who was a Frenchman, and two other designers--one of them myself. This studio was an oddity. It was located in a mansion on the upper East Side of Fifth Avenue. We sat there in sort of a rococo salon, very elegant. We had drawing desks, airbrush tank, and other studio equipment in that salon. It was odd enough and obviously colorful enough a setting that *Life Magazine* sent a photographer over. The idea was that this might make a story, but it never appeared.

So the photographer came in, and what amused me at that time was that he made the room really interesting by creating an unbelievable mess around our desks. Part of the mess were some bottles of booze. [laughter] This was something we did not indulge in, in actual fact, but it was meant to add flavor to the story. As an aside, I must say that at that time somebody gave me stacks of old *Life Magazines*, which I read

and studied from cover to cover. They were a fantastic introduction to America for me. I learned not only language from them, but also attitudes in America that they reflected. I cherished that magazine also for its unbelievable photography; no comparable picture magazine was known at that time in Europe.

Nathan: Did you have letters of introduction?

Lederer: Yes, I got some letters of introduction from Steiner-Prag, who had contacts with a number of American publishers from the time when he had arranged international exhibits of book design and had organized a collection of international book design for the crafts museum in Prague.

On the other hand, I found out that I had already seen most of the people by the time I got his list. Recommendations, which play a very important role in Europe were not really necessary here. I found out what days art directors saw artists, and simply went there. Sometimes that was somewhat disheartening because the information was, "We see artists on Thursdays between 10 and 12," and when you came there at 10 o'clock and were shown into a room, you found yourself faced with some twenty other people with similar portfolios and every eight or ten minutes the next person was called in.

So it gave me the idea I wasn't the only person that was seen, and the automatic response that they would keep you in mind had to be understood as well meant, but not necessarily to be taken literally. If somebody was really very much interested, they had a good way of trying to hold on to some kind of recollection by asking you to leave one piece of black and white art with them. They would make a small photocopy and attach it to a file card so that when they went to the file catalog, anything pictorial would then serve as a reminder of the person and of course also, in particular, of the kind of work that this person would be doing.

When I was at my first job, I did mostly package designs. They had to be worked out very carefully and detailed very painstakingly, because we had to produce sketches that imitated engraving into foil paper to show how it would look printed. We did reliefs by building up with layers of China white that subsequently we colored. I did one design that a sales person brought in as a possibility for an elegant dog kennel. That wrapping paper--I don't know what would be wrapped in a paper from a dog kennel--had all kinds of dogs on it, and each one was a bas relief.

We also designed some wine labels. In particular, we did all kinds of designs for Christmas promotions. That was in the sweltering New York summer, and there we were sitting with our shirts drenched and with sweat running down--we didn't have air-conditioning at that time yet--and did Christmas trees and snow scenes.

Nathan: Did you have any occasion to use originality?

Lederer: To a limited extent, within the scope of those tasks. Most of it was lettering, but it had to be well designed. I adjusted myself to the needs of the particular job and of that particular printing technique, giving the printing method a chance to show off at its best. That was a challenge, and the particular interest in creating these designs.

This job was fairly well paid, particularly according to my needs, which I kept simply on the same modest level on which I had started in the U.S. I had no inclination to expand just because I earned more money. I think it was simply a reaction to the uncertainty about how long anything would last, which was somewhat built in in all work situations as I had so far experienced them. It was also true in this case because this job ended when the war broke out, the whole thing, the studio and all that ended anyway.

First Book Jacket

Nathan: So you then--?

Lederer: So I started going back on my publishers' route, and I do not know how long it took before I broke down the first publisher to give me a book jacket to do. That was Macmillan. It was partly a success of persistency; I simply latched myself on to one person and kept calling that person every few days until he finally said he had some work for me. I can say that from that moment on the ice was broken, and I have always been active as designer and illustrator. That was the nice thing. There certainly have been lulls and stretches of time when I did not do any particular design work, which I could always use to do some other kind of art work, like drawing, painting, illustrating, partly also with the aim to have new work to show with which to approach publishers.

The very first job made obviously all the difference in the world. Whether that is psychology or merely the fact that

I could tell other publishers that somebody else has taken the chance and it worked out, that I do not know. Incidentally, when I went to publishers, I very often found them in quarters that looked from what I compared to my European experiences, very humble. The top people who were in charge of design sometimes sat in crowded offices together with many other people, something that I had not known when I visited publishers in Europe, where they were more personal. Many publishing offices that I had visited there were actually in homes so that there was more of a sense of comfort and privacy.

Technical Requirements

Nathan: What was your judgment of the technical quality of the reproduction of your designs?

Lederer: The reproductions were very good. What was baffling was the working requirements that designers were often asked to observe. On the very first job when the man gave me the OK on the accepted sketch, he said, "Finish this as a key-line drawing." I had never heard that word, and I certainly refrained from asking him what is a key-line drawing in order not to show that I'm not versed. I went to the public library and got a big volume on printing.

At that time, these highly specialized technical guidebooks that are now proliferating and are crowding the shelves of all art stores did not exist. This whole profession of the graphic designer as a specialist had not come into its own. Key-line drawing meant a rather tricky way of handling an artwork so that the artwork for two colors in which the job was meant to be reproduced was all done on one basic drawing with certain guidelines and instructions for the platemaker as to what goes into one color and what goes into the other color. All that was quite mystifying for me, but I struggled with it and I did it and it turned out right. The reproduction looked perfectly good, but there were working methods that were unknown to me from my European experience.

As far as the quality of the books themselves--if that is also implied in your questions--is concerned: most of them or a good number of them seemed rather indifferently done typographically, uninteresting, and without any particular kind of care or finesse. The exception, of course, was a genius publisher like Knopf, who not only knew how to find the

best American designers to help him but also was so conscious of the quality and the meaning of a typeface that he always had a special colophon in the back of his books describing what the typeface was and certainly also giving the name of the designer.

Salter, and the American Book Jacket

Lederer: Knopf, at that time, had engaged for very many of his book jackets, the help of George Salter, a designer of renown in Germany who had come to the states as a refugee from Hitler. Salter had a tremendous influence on shaping the appearance of the American book jackets; so that when I came, indirectly, I benefited from the spade work that Salter, in connection with Knopf and a few other publishers, had done there.

The distinguishing feature was that contrary to the frequent idea of putting a picture on the jacket and then adding somewhere, possibly done by somebody else, some sort of loud lettering or type, George Salter created an integrated design and an individual concept for each and every book for which he did a jacket design. He also realized that good books address an educated audience whom you do not have to hit over the head by garishness. That is in no way contrary to the concept that a jacket should be a selling device, but the selling device for a mature book-reading audience can use a different approach from the selling device that holds its own in the visual onslaught of a supermarket.

Simon and Schuster's Pocket Books

Lederer: One of the publishers from whom I got work was Simon and Schuster. Simon and Schuster were two very enterprising young men who had started a publishing house. A Viennese publisher had taken the book of Viennese songs that I had illustrated to them and they wanted to publish it. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War II terminated that project, which could have given my fortunes a great boost. But in any case, that was a good contact for me. Simon and Schuster had just started what became a true revolution in American publishing: the 25-cent pocket books.

By the time I came to them, they were maybe at, I do not know, number thirty or something like that. They gave me one cover after another to design, which was a lot of fun and a lot of interest, because I could really do full illustrations, painted and in full color. It was enjoyable to do. It always amused me that after their first inquiry (which was some kind of daring that I don't know how I had then) I backed out because they offered me a cover for a mystery story. I said, "I have no relation to mysteries." I don't know how I had the effrontery to do this. I had turned them down, and they, fortunately, were not turned off, and so they gave me others to do.

The first book was *The Light that Failed* by Kipling. That was in keeping with my style and background. Then they gave me Dorothy Parker's stories; *Little Men*; *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder--really books that are very American in subject matter and feel. But obviously they felt I could do them, and I did.

Columbia University Press

Lederer: Another publisher that responded particularly well to my work was Columbia University Press, where obviously a certain kind of restraint that is natural to my way of designing came in as a more acceptable thing than in many other publishing houses where I realized that what they wanted was not for me.

Jackets, Jackets, Jackets

Nathan: When you worked for Columbia University Press, were you designing the whole volume?

Lederer: No. As a matter of fact, that is something that I got into only much, much later. I had done that in Europe, but I did not do it at first in America. In America I did exclusively jackets, jackets, jackets. That was a time when few publishers actually had the desire, or saw the need, for a highly individual book design. Most of it was handled very much by routine. With my general bent towards wanting to do illustration and visual things, it actually suited me fine. I liked to do book jackets as an outlet for creating images with illustration, type, and lettering.

Fortunately, publishers did not ask me what my charge would be, because trying to figure that out from what I had gotten in Europe, I would have asked far too little. What they offered me by way of an automatic contract they gave to every designer was double or more of what I had gotten in Europe. This made it very nice for me because it meant, actually, I could live on two or three jackets per month.

Nathan: How long does it take to do a jacket?

Lederer: It takes me an awfully long time because I'm very slow. There are other people who would work the same thing considerably faster. It is part of my way of working that I need time. I have later learned--I will talk about that later--also to do things fast, but if I want to do what I consider quality work, I always need time.

Work Processes

Lederer: I took my time in order to do it as well as I possibly could do it, not only by preparing many different sketches but also by working them out well and trying to do the finished art very carefully. In addition to that, I did an awful lot of lettering for all kinds of jobs that I would now often handle simply as typographical jobs. I didn't mind the time spent on it, and in some way, it also added a certain feel of a personal touch by having done lettering by hand.

Preparing quite finished sketches to show and then doing the "mechanical," the finished artwork that goes to the printer, can take from five to ten days. Some designers show a number of "roughs," quite unfinished sketches, often in small size, to convey different basic concepts. I prepare quite detailed mock-ups, which I need to evaluate my own design. The question is often, how many different sketches should one show? I have gradually arrived at the idea that, unless I have two or more ideas that truly differ from each other, I simply make a choice of the one that I consider best. That choice is not easy. In former years, I used students occasionally as a test group. Now I ask mostly Hanni or my sons. If you show several ideas, there is always the chance that you confuse the clients, or get conflicting reactions if more than one person is involved; these can be the publisher, the author, the editor, the art director.

I cannot recall many instances of a design proposal being turned down, but if that occurs, I have never attempted to contradict a spontaneous reaction, but rather listen to find a direction for a different approach. I have found that, while "the client is always right" does not make sense, it is not my experience that the client is always wrong. Occasionally, a client wants a different background color, a wish that usually can easily be accommodated without any loss. Working in the book publishing field, my experiences may have been fortunate because the reactions to my work as a rule come from highly educated people whose responsiveness to literature and writing has also generally given them an appreciation and sensitivity for creative work in other fields.

What I said about the remuneration--what was important there was that at that time I still vacillated between my desire to simply draw and paint, and the applied work, the paid work as a background only to make it possible for me to do this. So when there were lulls like, for instance, summer months, and very little or nothing went on in publishing preparation as far as my work was concerned, it didn't bother me. I simply walked around in all parts of New York, made sketches, and translated what I drew into paintings or more elaborate drawings, of course, always with the idea that some day I would want to show that in an exhibit and possibly also sell.

I cannot describe all this as being very clearly reasoned or thought out. A great deal of all this just happened. I simply had enough of a backlog of money that I didn't have to desperately look for paid work, and I filled that time with drawing and painting, which I liked to do, and so things somehow fell into place.

Oddities in America

Nathan: Had you met people socially?

Lederer: Well, I had very close friends from Prague who had come to America, and we got together again. I had distant relatives here. There was the conductor, Arthur Bodanzky, and his family, known to me from his years in Mannheim. He died in December of the year I arrived, but I had visited with him and his wife in Vermont, where they had rented a very nice place for the summer.

Maybe I should digress on that visit by two things that struck me as rather unexpected in America: his place was located in Vermont in an area that was "restricted"--no Jews admitted. To hear about that was a rather startling thing for me, coming from Europe and the experiences there, made even more startling by the fact that I was there as a guest of a man who was himself a Jew. What he explained to me (and I would not say that this is terribly nice, but it was part of what I heard early in this strange land, America), was that this restriction referred only to certain types of Jews that were socially undesirable and that obviously he didn't consider very desirable, either.

Now, in retrospect, this gives me a bit of the horrors, the same way as at that time there was this man, Kuhn, who was such a rabid Nazi. Do you remember that?

Nathan: Vaguely.

Lederer: In any case, he extolled the Nazis.

I had some other young friends, Americans. One was the son of a friend from my mother's youth. I said, "How is that possible? That man publishes these rabble-rousing things? He should be imprisoned." My friend said, "Oh, no. That's not the way we do things in America; you cannot put a man in prison because he says what he thinks. We find out that he has done some sort of a tax evasion, and then he will be imprisoned," and that's exactly how it happened. [laughter]

Nathan: Oh, you were learning the ropes.

Lederer: I was learning the ropes, right. But the other thing that struck me in this lovely, beautiful Vermont landscape in which I was driven around in the very, very ritzy Rolls Royce of Mr. Bodanzky, I wanted to enter the beautiful woods and walk. I was told, "One cannot go into these woods; there is no way; there are no roads; there is no access." To be close to a mountain with woods and not go on lovely paths, hiking, exploring nature--that to me was an incredible oddity.

People so oftentimes ask what was the first thing that struck you in America when you arrived--these are a few of these things. In fact, the very first thing visually that struck me, the very day that I arrived, is that New York is not white and gray as I had anticipated, but brown. That was totally unexpected to me--the pervasive appearance of brown on these dark brick houses, brownstone houses, and so many buildings that were ochre.

But if it comes to the real difference--what really struck me as fundamentally different--although it took a while before I would recognize so that it became clear to me, is disorderliness here as compared to orderliness there.

In Europe, things are controlled and orderly. In America, to the extent that one can generalize such things, I found that appearances tend to be disorderly. A city is a jumble. I came from some of the city jewels of the world--Vienna, Prague, Paris--but even smaller and less exalted cities have a plan, an organization where certain kinds of buildings were and how they were grouped; how various sections of cities are set apart against each other. They are cleanly and clearly interrupted by parks in between. Whereas in America, every city I have been to is a visual jumble. In some way this is, of course, an expression of a country whose people resent regulations, submission to imposed standards of planning.

I did not find that disturbing. As a matter of fact, it's the thing that intrigued me. When I went around drawing, I could draw some dilapidated, falling together, red brick, one-story buildings and behind them facades of glamour and sheer facades soaring into the air. It's a fantastic sight; it's just in that way really essentially totally different from Europe. It is something that I think is still in my system; I'm still aware of disorderliness today when I go around San Francisco, a city I love.

But on the other hand, perversely, in the sixties, I was in Switzerland, and I suddenly realized that I had a terrible itching to do something about this pervasive primness. [laughter] But I think it is important that a basic sense of order is ingrained in me, I think, and it explains the difficulty of students to accept that as an underlying concept. In teaching design, it was a necessity to present order as an underlying principle. We will probably come to talk about that later on again.

These were really the most striking impressions, apart from the pervasive friendliness of people that I found so very alluring. I also very soon learned about the difference in the schools that I have already mentioned last time.

American Book Design

Lederer: We are still talking about New York. Well, maybe I should mention what I had known about American book design before I came here. Very little. I knew some of the names that were prominent here like Dwiggins, and Goudy; certainly I knew about their work. I knew with great respect and awe about the publications of the Limited Editions Club and that they paid their famous illustrators $1,000 per volume, which was, of course, in the thirties in Europe, rather much of a fantasy figure.

And the other thing that I knew about American publishing were children's books.

Nathan: Why is that?

Lederer: Because they were so wonderful. I had seen an international exhibit of children's books. There was a small section of Russian children's books that were illustrated by a few exceptional artists, who in the earlier years after the revolution did some wonderful work. But as far as large-scale, rich production is concerned, America had it over all of them in imagination, in exquisiteness of execution, production, in richness of color.

That was quite, quite overwhelming, and I think this is also where a good deal of big publishing efforts in America went: producing something that was really attractive, enough so to make the difference that parents wanted to buy one children's book in preference to another one. They were very beautiful, and they certainly had also used the help of some very wonderful illustrators, as they have to this day.

Of course, what came through always in such books, and came through as a forte, is the wonderful sense of humor that Americans often have, which incidentally, also, for us had come through in Europe in the Disney films.

Nathan: You were saying that you saw *Snow White* as a technical accomplishment?

Lederer: Well, the technical accomplishment, of course, was quite overwhelming at that time, but that was only a part of it. When I saw it in Prague, I knew already that I wanted to come to America, and certainly that film offered a very persuasive

argument, telling me that America cannot be all that wild, with people only running and only money-grubbing and everybody at each other's throat. There must be a sort of, almost childlike, sense of acceptance of friendly attitudes and, most of all, a wonderful sense of humor.

For that reason the Disney film--at that time it was only *Snow White*--was a real ambassador that told me a good deal about America and something very positive and very alluring.

Selling Christmas Cards

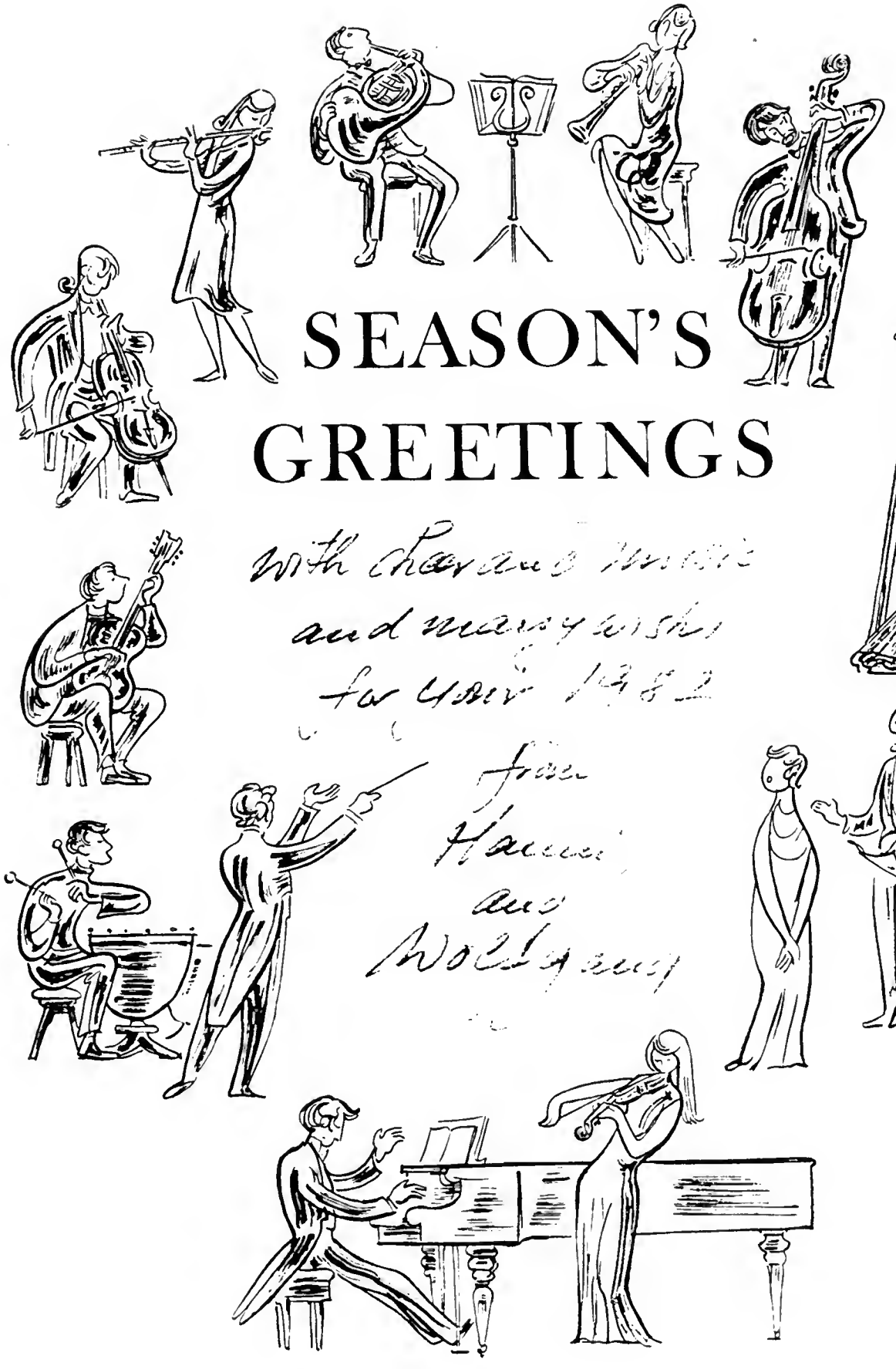
Lederer: As I mentioned earlier, I knew a designer in Vienna who always told me, "You should go to America." She knew America from having worked there. She also did something else--she sold some Christmas card of mine there when I was still in Prague. I saw that there was a response to something that was subtle and lighthearted, not cute and not heavy. So all that added to my positive feelings about what I could expect in America, which otherwise had seemed a very forbidding place in my mind.

When I was in New York, I did make contact with the American Artists Group, which was venturing at that time into new ways of doing Christmas card design that would be off the beaten track. Let's just call it that. They accepted my designs, and for many years, I did card designs for them. Then, later on, after maybe thirty years or so, unfortunately the wonderful attitude that they had had--trying to really do something out of the ordinary, something a bit more delicate and not so commercial--broke down. It got swamped away with the general commercial tide, and this whole business was overwhelmed to such an extent by the competition with the gigantic production firms that they could not hold their own against that.

But while it lasted, it was a very lovely outlet because they did a beautiful job of reproduction, and you could do something that you couldn't do anywhere else so easily.

Salter, Kredel, Eichenberg

Nathan: That would have been around 1941?


SEASON'S
GREETINGS
With Christmas Wishes
and many wishes
for a New Year
from
Harold
and
Wendy

Lederer: It was in New York between 1939 and 1941 and continued later from San Francisco, when I moved there. I should mention some of my colleagues from Europe whom I met because they are significant in my life. I have already talked about George Salter. George Salter was very helpful in an area where he himself was after all working and looking for work. I was in a slight way able to pay him back later on when I arranged an exhibit of his work in Oakland and gave talks about his work.

Another person whom I met was Fritz Kredel, who came from the famous Offenbach Design School where Rudolf Koch had been his master, and he had intimately worked with him. In New York, Kredel was very active doing children's and juvenile book illustrations, and also illustrations for the Limited Editions Club, with unbelievable versatility and skill and inventiveness--a wonderful person to meet.

The third one was Fritz Eichenberg, who ten years before my time in Leipzig had been a Steiner-Prag student and who was also well established in Manhattan, mostly as a great master of wood engraving, which he used for illustration. Being an unusually skilled and extraordinary performer in this field, he was also given a position at the Pratt Institute, where he created a Graphic Arts Center that had a great influence on a renewed interest for the graphic arts in America. Later, at the college in Oakland, I had him visit at times as a guest instructor and induced the college to give him an honorary degree. We became very close friends. He is a wonderful person and one who has with his work, teaching, and publications, left a very definite mark on American graphic arts and illustration. As for American designers and artists, I did not meet any at that time.

WPA Murals

Lederer: What I saw of American art--apart from what I saw in avid visits to the endless numbers of galleries of Manhattan on Saturday afternoons, going from one to the other and getting to know the work of Stuart Davies, Kunioshi, Reginald Marsh, and Calder and whoever else was prominent at that time--what struck me as particularly unusual and impressed me very much were these varied murals in the post offices. I only later learned that this was all a result of the WPA projects. They were not only very well done--after all, some of America's best artists like Ben Shahn were involved in these projects--

they also had recorded subjects from American history that were very fascinating for me.

The mere fact that a post office would be used as a place to put such interesting murals on the wall struck me as a very, very good and positive way of using art. I have maintained a strong feeling that art flourishes best if it has a place where it belongs. I find the current art situation where art is an isolated element related to the life of people only by way of being an object that has entertainment, intellectual or monetary value rather undesirable; the great forms of art have always flourished when what the artist did had a physical place and was part of people's lives. In this WPA project I found that idea beautifully expressed, and a return of that concept would be something that I would highly welcome, not only for the sake of the artist but also for the sake of getting the arts and the people together--the way it has so often been in past times.

I think that is really what I can say about my acquaintance with American art and American artists as I came to know them in the beginning. I certainly did see the work of many contemporary artists in the galleries and also in the museum--there was already the Museum of Modern Art.

Nathan: Did I understand that you had a showing of some of your paintings and drawings in New York?

Lederer: No. I did not have a gallery show. The one in the rooming house that I mentioned in passing is the one where two watercolors were stolen. [laughter]

Drawing Bridges, and Meeting the Police

Lederer: Well, talking about such incidents--at one point I wanted to make a series of lithographs of all the bridges of New York, and so I went systematically after each and every one. At one time I was standing on a bridge--that was in '41--drawing another bridge across the way, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and I looked around and there was a huge, burly policeman who beckoned me to come along. When I turned around there was another policeman waiting for me, and they took me to the police car. I didn't put up any resistance. I didn't know what it was all about, but next to them stood a man who pointed to me, and I recognized that man as somebody who had engaged me in a customary conversation, "Do you do this

drawing for fun?" that sort of thing. In the meanwhile, the Germans had declared war and there was a war scare, and that man had denounced me as drawing some important railroad bridges.

I was taken to a prison and put behind bars together with some noisy people, and I was utterly bewildered. I was not given access to a telephone at that time. One officer conducted some telephone conversations in front of me: "We have 'this' guy here who now pretends he doesn't really understand English so well," which was no wonder because I was in the deep Bronx at that moment. [laughter]

Well, in any case, after a while, I was taken before a judge in a regular courtroom, and the two policemen who had taken me along were present and they were sworn in. I saw they were raising their hands; so I thought that's the thing to do here, and I raised my hand, too, whereupon the judge shushed me down. It was not for me to swear in this situation. [laughter] Maybe it convinced them that I was not terribly, terribly expert as a spy. In any case, he asked me whether I plead guilty, the accusation being that I had drawn on the bridge. I thought, yes, that's what I had done, if that's what I'm guilty of. I said, "Yes, I'm guilty," and with that the whole thing ended.

They took me out. There still followed an investigation by the F.B.I. When the F.B.I. man came, he asked me some questions that were rather transparent even for my rather inexperienced frame of mind. He took me in his car and wanted to see the place where I live, and, of course, the moment he entered that little room, he saw these big sketch books of drawings and on top of the heap, there were all those of bridges, one after the other. I told him that's what I have drawn. That's what interested me. He asked me a few more questions, but then after an hour or so, that also ended. I do not know what the follow-up of it was or whether there was continuing surveillance. It has remained to this day only a funny story of what all can happen to a greenhorn.

Nathan: Caught up in the war scare?

Lederer: Well, sure, certainly.

Nathan: Are we nearly ready, then, to start you off toward the West?

Lederer: Yes, sure.

An Invitation to Visit San Francisco

Lederer: The summer of '41 was beckoning, and again I had planned to spend the summer drawing and painting, when I got from California a very nice invitation from the woman friend I had had in Vienna. Her parents and two sisters had in the meanwhile come to San Francisco as refugees from Hitler, having been sponsored and helped in every way by Albert Samuels, a very well-known jeweler with a store on Market Street since before the big earthquake and who had been a friend since many years. Being a family of very hardworking and enterprising people, they had all gotten into various kinds of work, had acquired a house, and had an extra room. So they said, "Why don't you come out West and visit with us?"

At that time one could take a train, round-trip ticket, from New York to San Francisco and back to New York for $100. So I bought the ticket and very, very carefully figured out that I would make a trip on which I would see just as much of the United States as possible, which meant that I took the trip to San Francisco through the middle of America and planned to go back via the South to see New Mexico, Arizona, New Orleans, and so on.

I arrived after three days, having stopped over in Salt Lake City and in Chicago. I saw the Garden of the Gods and all the landscape, the plains and the mountains that I knew only from the *Leatherstocking Tales*, and the vast stretches of desert. It was a very, very exhilarating and exciting and wonderful kind of trip with the train and the amount of things I saw in such a short time. I arrived in Oakland; I took the ferry over to San Francisco where at that time Coit Tower was by far the highest peak [laughter]--this was in 1941--and met my friend in the Ferry Building, and was then taken to her family's home in the Richmond District of San Francisco.

VI THE CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS (1941-1980)

Nathan: How long had you planned to stay in San Francisco?

Lederer: I would say six weeks probably, and I spent the whole summer just drawing. I didn't think of making any professional contacts. At one time during my stay, somebody, a friend of that family, said, "Why don't you meet the president of the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland? I think it would be interesting for you." Well, since they were nice people, and it was a personal introduction, I went and met this elderly gentleman, Dr. Frederick Meyer, who was the founder and creator of the college. I showed him my work, which he liked but said that he didn't have a job. I said, "I'm not looking for a job," and that was it.

Then, two weeks before I wanted to leave, Dr. Meyer called me up and said, "I have a vacancy here. Somebody who was teaching design and advertising art cannot continue. Would you be interested?" So I went there and talked to him, and he said he would want me to teach two days, and that he would compensate me to the tune of $5 a session--that meant $20 a week, $80 a month. I thought, "Well, how nice. I can work two days and the rest of the time I can draw. So why not?" After all, I had been teaching in Europe, and I liked the place.

Attractions of the College

Lederer: I liked the place for several reasons: first of all, the location was very pleasant in a green setting with rambling--not very impressive, but obviously suitable--buildings. The way I saw it, this college had underlying an idea that I was familiar with and that in a way even appealed to me. That was the adherence to the Arts and Crafts movement that was

embodied in its name, which meant that the arts were taught as something that is related to life. Basically in philosophy, I thought there is a school that is different from what I had observed of other art schools. They were very often like, for instance, the Art Students League, simply an assembly of studios in which various prominent people taught but without any kind of interlinking of ideas.

Teaching Advanced Design and Advertising Art

Lederer: Now when I was told that I was to teach one class of advanced design, I asked rather innocently whether that would mean drawing from life because I translated the word "design" from my dictionary as "drawing." The design, as such, really has no equivalent in German. To this day, when people talk about design in Germany, the English word is used.

I was told that, no, this was not a class in drawing but in design. I did not ask more questions, but I went to the public library and got some books on design, which then I realized had been embedded in our teaching in Leipzig and Prague, and had been part of all studies, but not isolated as a separate discipline. I also found out what the students were doing in the preceding class. In any case, I made up some kind of work plan that I thought would be suitable to be taught as advanced design.

The other class that I was to teach was what was then called commercial art and was very, very elementary, touching on graphics applied to advertisements in the form of newspaper advertisements or posters or things of that kind. In that case the man who had taught the course before me could give me some kind of lead of what he had been doing, so that I had a model, whereas I simply improvised the other class, figured out what could be a reasonable course. I decided that I would gear my classes towards professional attitudes. In other words, I planned assignments that allowed them at the same time to deal with principles of design and handling, and the need to think in terms of what specific response a task asked for by its nature.

Nathan: Was this somewhat of a departure from the way these courses had been taught?

Lederer: Yes, the design course had been strictly taught as a course in decorative work, and that was not what I had in mind at all. One very odd course being taught there was called "historical ornament," in which the students studied history of ornament and then "applied" it to objects of daily use. But that, of course, to my way of thinking was absolutely not what one should do, to simply add a particular ornament taken from a past period to dress up an object.

What I had in mind was an appearance that grows out of the usage of an object, be it a poster or title page or advertisement, and emphasize what its appearance should be under the conditions under which it is seen, rather than to simply make it pretty by adding decoration. If you want to call that philosophy, it was basically the idea with which I started my teaching there. What totally petrified me was that I had observed such a class and had seen that this was a regular school class, in which the students sat on benches with the teacher occupying a place in front at a desk. It was something that I had associated with all my school experiences and was entirely different from anything that I had experienced in my own professional studies. The mere idea to have to face a group of people who would stare at me, thirty of them, and to lecture to them--I can only say I was utterly petrified.

Well, I prepared myself as well as I could and told the students as badly as I could in my still halting and insufficient English what I planned to do, and they stared back at me. Again, from a human point of view, these first weeks when I barged in there and presented the students with attitudes and demands that they were entirely not used to were a wonderful experience. These young people--for one thing they didn't have it easy with me, and for another they could simply have walked all over me, and they did not do anything of that kind--far from it.

Assignments and Grades

Lederer: Maybe they realized that I meant well, that I wanted to help them. Maybe they realized that I had something to offer. A good instinct may have told them that. Their minds were not cluttered, so they could see what was really there in spite of all kinds of oddities and insufficiencies, and they were basically kind. In any case, it worked out, and we did establish a good rapport; although to their way of thinking I

was absolutely incredibly demanding. When we had discussed an assignment, and they had made their first sketches, and I had discussed them with them, I said, "Well, finish it now," and I expected that the next time I came to class, they would show me the completed work.

Nothing of that kind happened because I had not given the task as an "assignment," and I had not specified at what time it was to be turned in. My attitude was based on the assumption that we had a mutual aim: we wanted to do this work and work together, and, of course, you are terribly interested to get the work done, so you will spend all your free time completing it, and then we go on to the next thing. That was the kind of approach I happened to have been acquainted with. So again I learned that this had to be considerably more organized and regulated, and then I had to learn to grade the work. All that I gradually found out.

Setup of the College

Lederer: What was the most bewildering thing for me at the school was the setup of the institution as a college, which offered a college degree, combining the liberal arts with the creative arts; and with the liberal arts offered on the same campus by a special faculty. In all my acquaintance with art schools, the general education, the liberal arts, was what you had behind you. You simply didn't touch that any more when you went to art school, you did art from morning to night, and that was it.

Also new to me was the very limited time that the students spent on each of the subjects that I taught them. The idea was to acquaint students with all kinds of areas in the arts and thereby have them acquire a feeling for their interrelations. This was, at this school, taught by simply getting everybody first in touch with everything the school offered. I recall with pleasure that at one time I had in my advertising design class as students Ralph Borge, Lundy Siegriest, Charles Gill, Nathan Oliveira, all of whom are prominent California painters now. It all meant that what I was used to acquiring in a lengthy process, almost by osmosis over a long stretch of time, had to be offered to these students in a much more comprehensive course of study and in such a way as to make it worthwhile as a survey.

Advanced studies there or elsewhere could build on this broad base if students wanted to make a particular field in the arts or crafts their lifetime pursuit. But this jumping from one study subject to another was fundamentally different from what I had experienced in my learning years, in which only what related to your chosen field in the arts was the subject of studies that could therefore be considerably more thorough and far-going.

To me, all this meant a great deal of reading, soul searching, questioning, talking to other people at the college and finding out what was right, what I should do or how I could do it better within a setup that was new to me.

How the College Began

Nathan: Did the president or the dean or other faculty members exchange ideas with you?

Lederer: No. No, that was not done in the early years. Mr. Meyer, as the president, guided the school in a rather authoritarian manner. He came once in a while to my class and looked around and over students' shoulders, but he obviously thought that what I was doing was right. He was himself a German from Hamburg who had come to America as a young architect before the earthquake. He had started this school rather much by way of an odd occurrence. He had published an article about the British Arts and Crafts movement in a newspaper and had said that there should be a school to teach along these ideas. Some people misread that as saying that he was going to start such a school. He was swamped with letters by people who were very much interested in such plans.

That persuaded him to do it, and on a very small scale, he started a school in Berkeley. Being a very enterprising and energetic man, he badgered the people in Sacramento to support that, claiming that he would give teachers in the high school art classes a better training. He received support and ultimately he acquired college credit; when the school flourished, he moved it to the present site where it is now on Broadway and College Avenue. He bought the Treadwell four-acre private estate and transformed one of the main buildings, Treadwell Hall, into offices, library and studios. On the upper floor Mr. Meyer and his family lived.

This large, beautifully landscaped estate, which by now has been considerably built up with additional studios, was

tended at that time by Mr. Meyer himself, with the help of a gardener. When I took my wife for the first time to the campus, she said, "Oh, see this nice old gardener there." I said, "No, that's the president of the college." [laughter]

Hanni and Her Family

Nathan: Well, maybe we should go back a moment. This is wonderful. I just wanted to find out when you met Hanni and when you married.

Lederer: Well, Hanni, my wife, is of course that friend from Vienna whose parents invited me to visit in San Francisco.

Nathan: She was related to the Samuels family?

Lederer: No, no. Samuels was a friend of her parents'. He had visited with them in Vienna and had always told them, "If anything ever goes wrong here, I will take care of you all." When Hitler took over Austria, he was true to his word.

He was then helpful in introducing them to various people, and so my future wife got a job at The White House, a big department store. She was good at languages, and so the president of the store, a friend of Mr. Samuels, hired her to work as an interpreter to help visitors to the store who were expected from all over the world to come and see the World's Fair at Treasure Island. Not many foreign language-speaking people came to the store, so she was transferred to another job, this one as a secretary, which was very hard for her as her English wasn't that good yet. But she learned fast.

At the time when we got together again in 1941, we were certainly not thinking of marriage; we just were very good friends. Also, I thought of returning to New York. But then I stayed in San Francisco, and in 1943 we got married.

Is that enough about the relation to my wife?

Students, Attitudes, and the College Calendar

Nathan: Yes. Would you like to say anything about the students at the school?

Lederer: Yes. Right. You help me very much if you ask such questions. The majority of the students there were women. And so the college was a little bit under the aura that for women it was a nice school to go to; it was a good place for them to get acquainted with the arts and possibly meet interesting young men there. As a matter of fact, as I learned later on, my first women students were terribly disappointed when as one of the first facts of my private life, they learned that I had a girlfriend already.

Nathan: I see. That's quite natural. Should I gather that these students were not really focused on professionalism?

Lederer: Apart from those who wanted to go into high school art teaching, with very few exceptions, they did not focus on a profession; although some of them did develop into professionals. In those years during the war, the majority of students were women whose outlook for a career in graphic design at that time was still quite limited. Of course, my tendency, supported by Mr. Meyer, was very much to push the professional practical aims of students. As a matter of fact, in one of the early years that I was there, Mr. Meyer hired a teacher for fashion illustration, a woman who was a former graduate of the college. She had worked as advertising artist at Livingston's, an apparel store in San Francisco. She was forever grateful for the education she had gotten at the college in its early beginnings and remained devoted to it all her life. She was most supportive and helpful in all I did--her name was Carol Purdy.

She was from an old Berkeley family, a remarkable and wonderful person who has meant much in the life of many students, to many of whom she was a wise advisor, and an inspiration for the rest of their lives. For me, with the endless amounts of things I later attempted to do on the two days I was at the college every week, I could never have accomplished all that without her contribution. We had a wonderful work relation.

Nathan: Yes, I see. About how large was the enrollment when you first came?

Lederer: I would say under two hundred.

It was a small school, and there were about thirty students in each class. This was quite a lot for two-and-a-half-hour sessions to take care of, because it meant lecturing, reviewing work, and demonstrating work procedures.

There were two terms, a spring and a fall term, and then a six week summer session.

The summer session was attended by many high school art teachers who wanted to refresh their skills or take special courses. In that connection, I met as students a great number of nuns from the Catholic schools. They offered to me a quite new experience. I found them open-minded, interesting and devoted to what they were doing, and, in addition, most of the time they had an awful lot of fun. To them, this was a period of freedom and of getting to know odd creatures like Wolfgang Lederer. [laughter]

Nathan: Yes, that's part of their education, I am sure.

Lederer: Most of them were very nice and interesting to work with. And, like most of the students, they were friendly, open-minded, with a directness and naturalness that I found immensely appealing. I can work well with students of all kinds of background and levels of talent, as long as I sense a devoted attitude towards their work and a serious desire to grow in it. What I found difficult to take were sometimes unprofessional attitudes--childishness, or tears when I did not laud the work. Altogether, if we again want to make a comparison between here and there, Europe and America, I was not in any way--I could probably say to the last day--prepared for, and I never was able to fully adjust to the incredible need of students to be patted on the shoulders.

Nathan: Of course, praise.

Lederer: Praise. That is something that virtually did not exist in our European education. If, occasionally, a word was said that you had done something good, that was quite something, but generally you were prodded to do better. This also always interested me in the students' work--to find out how they could do it better. That they had made an effort, I took for granted. But here students are so used to encouragement for effort made, that I had often consciously, or conscientiously, to remember that need for praise. I emphasized to my students that enthusiasm for what they were doing in my classes should not depend on my encouragement but should emanate from their interest in the field in which they were working and from their eagerness to grow in it. It can happen sometimes that students produce extraordinary work in classes under the inspiring influence of a fascinating teacher personality, but that can become meaningless if they cannot maintain or surpass that level once they are no longer under the immediate influence of that personality. Altogether, I believe that it

is a matter of great good fortune for a young person to find that he or she is so in tune with the thinking and personality of a teacher that what is offered remains an inspiration for life. In most cases, what can be expected is a step or steps in development, a gain in insight or knowledge, an assistance in growing.

The Arts and Crafts Movement

[Interview 3: June 15, 1988]

Lederer: We talked last time about coming to the college and the basic idea of the college being, in its name, part of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Nathan: Yes. Was that related to the movement in England?

Lederer: That was exactly the same thing. A book on the Arts and Crafts movement in America that has recently appeared[1] has a section devoted to the college because of its commitment to that very idea. I think I can bypass explaining the Arts and Crafts movement as such because that has been abundantly done.

To me it was important that the college had an underlying idea. As it then happened in the following forty years, a lot of that idea went down the drain and was not really clarified any more. In other words, people ultimately even reached the point that they very reluctantly accepted this term as being connected with a movement that by that time was considered passé, and was even by some people who came new to the faculty looked upon with a great deal of suspicion, with the pejorative term, "craftsy," being employed. That was the very thing that they did not want--something connected in their minds with old ladies in tennis shoes who weave baskets or do things of that kind.

To my mind, it is a very potent idea that all artists have an understanding of their craft, a relation to the materials with which they work and of the conditions under which the work is seen or used. That connection is something that I felt has remained totally valid and particularly, of course, also in the field of design. We always have to talk

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[1]The Arts and Crafts Movement in America (Art Museum Series, Princeton University Press, 1972).

about the "how" in addition to the concept of the "what." It is interesting to me that with many changes going on right now under a new administration at the college, the roots of the institution in the Arts and Crafts movement are strongly emphasized after they had been downplayed for such a long time.

American Attitude Toward Change

Lederer: Behind such changes in attitude is, of course, the willingness to change. Everything that I had experienced in Europe--not that I was aware of it, but in retrospect I realize that whether it was in politics or in the education system--it was always based on vested ideas. A change was something that only came about very slowly and reluctantly and sometimes not at all. Whereas in America I was absolutely amazed at the willingness of people to jump from one thing to another, change the whole thing upside down at a moment's notice or simply because an idea seemed good, say, "Let's do it."

I find this, particularly also in the political life, very good and refreshing because the possibility for change is always around the corner. As far as building up anything in an educational situation, of course, it is fraught with pitfalls and difficulties. The readiness to make changes for change's sake can lead to giving up good things and throwing overboard ideas and procedures that had been arrived at with a great deal of effort and a great deal of thought. In that respect, I experienced over the years a tremendous amount of zigzagging, going back and forth. The going was not always very easy, particularly also since my work setup allowed me only a very limited amount of time to devote, in addition to teaching, to also working on the build-up and organization of a design department for the whole college.

Arrival of the GIs (1945-1946)

Lederer: But again I'm actually a bit ahead of myself because what I really have to tell is that after I had been there (I started in '41) through the years of World War II with almost no male students present, there came in '45, '46 the unbelievable onrush of GIs. That meant a change in the setup that altered the college for good because it meant suddenly there were not

only these quantities of people but it also meant that they came with a totally different attitude from the students that had been there before.

Nathan: What was the new attitude?

Lederer: Well, the new attitude was that these were people who had matured in a war and who knew what life was all about. They were not searching or only marginally interested in the arts and trying to find out what they could possibly do in these fields. They came with a mind bent to go in as direct a line as possible toward something with which they could build their lives. In addition to that, the GI Bill offered opportunities for higher education to people who formerly would have been stranded in whatever kind of jobs they could land without incentive or means for higher education being available.

So the student body was totally new with needs to which, of course, an institution like this small college had to respond. When I started out, we had maybe 200 students; at the climax of the GI period, we had up to 1500 in the same place. That meant that, at a tremendous pace, leftover army buildings were bought and put up as studios on campus, facilities were acquired in locations nearby, faculty was hired, and the whole curriculum was changed to meet the needs of these people.

Nathan: Did you find that the GIs were interested in any liberal arts?

Lederer: They were interested in everything. By and large, for them it was a tremendous adventure. That's the way I sensed it. It was the adventure to be suddenly thrown in with these strange beings, the professors, artists, craftspeople, and designers who had all kinds of ideas that they had never come across. It was an opportunity to get into areas they had not thought it would be possible to get into in the normal course of things. A vitality and the spirit of discovery pervaded everything. It was really quite wonderful. It also meant, of course, a tremendous amount of pressure for a new administration after Dr. Meyer had retired. Things had to be done very, very fast. Decisions had to be made on how to cope with the new situations. At that point, and I do not even know which year that was, I was made Chairman of the Design Department. That was an administrative decision, and again the way these things went at the college, not strictly--how should I say--in the usual way of academic institutions.

At a later time, the position was changed to Director of the Design Division. I was in charge to organize a program

which allowed the later additions of Interior and Industrial Design. There was also a graduate program, leading to a MFA degree. I usually discouraged applicants who desired to enter that program in continuation of undergraduate studies, advising them to get a job as a more suitable way to deepen what they had acquired in the past four years. There were, however, a number of instances where professionals, after several years in the field, had a desire to change their outlook, explore certain directions, and such applicants were welcome. I can recall some very wonderful experiences with some of these exceptional students.

Basic Design Classes in a Foundation Program

Lederer: Expanded studies in basic design became part of a two-year foundation program that all students, regardless of their major, had to take. In the two following years, those who wanted to become graphic designers or illustrators took a required work load of classes that offered development steps in the design disciplines necessary for the profession, to which in later years also those of Interior and Industrial design were added. I had an assistant to help with those organizational activities but continued to teach the advanced professional classes. Considering that I was on campus only twice a week, that meant a great load of work and responsibilities on these two days. Department meetings, or those with individual teachers, were held during lunch hours and in the evenings.

Hiring Faculty and Creating the Graphic Design Program

Lederer: You asked me how that was with hiring additional faculty. Well, the additional faculty came either from people I happened to know in the profession and whom I could ask whether they would be interested to participate. And there were always people who applied and who were interested to teach whom I either knew from their professional work or who showed in portfolios or on slides what they were doing. I interviewed them, explained to them what was to be done, and then introduced them into the faculty. This is by and large the same procedure that prevails in all academic institutions; only that again because of the particular setup of this

college, everything was done in a less, let's say, involved, cumbersome manner.

If I refer to the specific setup, that also means that, as a private institution that maintained itself on what the students paid as tuition, the college was in no position to pay salaries comparable to state institutions or organizations of that kind. That meant that teachers could not, or did not, make their living exclusively from what limited opportunities the college could financially offer.

Nathan: Were you looking for any particular characteristics in the people you hired?

Lederer: Well, quite certainly, in the first place I looked for real quality in their own work as well as attitudes toward teaching and an understanding of our aims. I did not look for big names. That's a common fallacy. Big names, of course, attract students and are an advertising medium, but they are not necessarily the best teachers. I tried to find out how they would relate to students or whether they had had experience in that respect, anything that could give me a clue in that way. Of course, they were only accepted for a limited time until they could prove they could do it well. Whether they taught well one saw in students' exhibits, one found out in which way they participated in meetings, one listened to the students talking about instructors. All that is not as easy as I maybe make it seem right now. It's a known difficulty to find out who is a good teacher, but in the plastic arts there is something to look at in reviewing the students' work, that ultimately reveals something about the guidance and direction offered by a teacher.

What I tried to build up was a very definite program of progression which should allow for new faculty members who came in to be confronted with a definite program for that class. This is, of course, contrary to very many people's thinking who feel every teacher should present what he or she feels inclined to do. But in a coordinated education that is meant not just to offer a bird's eye view of a variety of personal attitudes and individual ideas, teachers have to be aware of the level of their class as a link from the comparatively easy-to-grasp thing to the more complex level so that students can have a guidance for growth. What also had to be avoided, of course, is deadly repetition--one person offering the same thing that another had already done.

Communication Arts

Lederer: In spite of this insistence on a coordinated progression in the nature of assignments, the personality of individual teachers still colored what each teacher offered. Their reactions to the way the program was set up were welcome, and new ideas were incorporated. We had meetings about such questions so that we should all see eye to eye. With forever changing demands in the profession and with the rapid growth of the faculty, my aims did not by any means always work out. Still, a few main ideas, an emphasis on quality, a work ethos that individual convictions and not the attitudes of the market place must ultimately guide what we present to the students, these ideas remained. Also our aim was not to develop specialists in a narrow field or with a limited outlook for what a momentary fashion might dictate. Essentially, design, as we taught it, embraced the whole field of communication arts: communication in words, images, and illustration. It covered a very broad area, not a narrowly specialized one.

It also allowed us to have in the same classes students of very different bends and talent. This is very crucial. Maybe I should talk about that at this point, as an idea of teaching in this field. What I tried to do, also in keeping with what was inherent in the name of the Arts and Crafts movement, was to let students get a full idea of all the possibilities that exist in these communication arts and at the same time guide them to find responses to specific tasks that are in keeping with their particular talent.

Focus on the Student at the Desk

Lederer: In other words, if they were strongly illustratively oriented, they could handle the assignments with emphasis on illustration, but it did not mean that they should not understand how typography or lettering interact in instances with illustration. Vice versa, the purely design-oriented people who cannot do illustration should understand illustration enough so that maybe later they could understand how to guide an illustrator or a photographer with whom they might work. That meant essentially emphasis on individual instruction.

That is the tradition with which I had grown up. I knew how it is for the instructor to come to a student's desk and to talk about what a student had done, what you thought could be better, what's right or wrong and so on. This could also lead to pulling the class together if something of a general nature occurred, and then one could talk about that to all the students. Of course, any student in the class was always free to participate, but the talking was directed to the individual whose work was under discussion.

Nathan: Do I understand then that the students were not in competition with each other?

Lederer: They were in competition with each other to the extent that they all had the same assignment in one class. When the assignment was completed, they could see that other people had done it in different ways. Competition per se, in other words, that one has really done it very well, and one had done it very badly, that I found simply did not enter. If somebody had done something very well and had answered a problem splendidly, well certainly one would hold it up and say, "This is very, very good." But essentially that was not the point.

The point was to make individual students realize their potential to the best end. The range of abilities within such a class--at that time, there were no entrance requirements except some very general scholastic tests at the beginning--was incredibly large and, likewise of intellectual capacities, was extremely varied. To my mind the only way to really reach these students was to talk to them individually.

I came to realize only later on when students spoke up that I had difficulty with this approach because the students were not used to it. They were used to being given an assignment to work on. After the completion, the work was displayed, and the so-called class crit [criticism] took place. In other words, the pieces were there to be seen, and the instructor would then analyze the merits or nonmerits of various pieces. To my mind, or simply to my ability, this procedure is not very good because it leads to generalizations that are not sufficiently potent. Also, too many people are left out, indirectly, because if you talk to an individual personally, eye to eye, you see how that individual reacts. Is the reaction, "I don't know what you are talking about," or is the reaction, "Eureka, now I have it"?

If you have thirty people in front of you, nothing of that kind happens, and you talk simply in general terms. So I maintained that individual procedure to the end, although in

response to the urging of the students--and as I ultimately even sensed it, obviously the students had a need to be involved in more of a mass thing--I did also offer occasional class crits.

Nathan: You were saying that in this individual conversation, understanding occurred--

Lederer: --at the desk--

Nathan: --at the student's desk. Could a student come up to you and initiate the conversation?

Lederer: Oh, anytime--

Nathan: --if there were a problem or--?

Lederer: Oh, certainly, anytime. Well, it would all have to fit in. The sessions were two-and-one-half-hours. There were twenty-five students, so after a general talk or demonstrations, to review conscientiously all the students' work that I wanted to review in progress, I was running against time.

Maybe this is a good moment to relate one experience that could, in my opinion, not have happened in a general discussion. When I was a student in Prague, I had once prepared a series of book jacket sketches for a book by Zola, *L'Oeuvre* (The Masterwork). I spent my weekend on that and thought I really had something great. Steiner-Prag came to my desk and said, "I don't like that." I mean that's the way it was in Europe; you did not soft-pedal your opinions. He simply said, "I don't like that." Then he was called to the telephone, and I had to wait for ten minute stewing there about why he did not like it. That was followed by a short talk that revealed to me what illustration is about. What I had presented was the scene of a studio. The way I thought it would be was a big studio that the artist as described in that book would have. There was a model or no model in another sketch, and messiness--in any case, the way I had imagined it as dramatic and interesting for that book. It's a book, incidentally, about a fictional figure of a painter based on Zola's friend, Cézanne.

Steiner-Prag explained to me, "Don't you remember that in that story the studio is in this and this part of Paris? Don't you know how the buildings look in that part of Paris? What is the architectural structure of the upper roofs?"

Nathan: Mansard roof?

Lederer: The Mansards. "What would the influence be on such a studio? How would the light be? Where are the skylights placed?" All that he said developed to me the feel of what the illustrator does, namely that he does not repeat what's already in the book but expands on it. That talk was maybe five, seven minutes at my desk, and it changed my outlook. Again, I cannot think of this being said to a whole group of students in these terms, none of whom would have known what this book was all about, who Zola was, had never been in Paris, what the whole thing was that he was talking about. He was telling this to me, who had read that book with enthusiasm and was acquainted with it in all its aspects. That's what I mean, that it can only happen that way, and sometimes it's very surprising.

The other day I had a call from a former student who quoted something that I had told her about her work which had made a great difference in her development. It sounded like something that I could only have said in such a personal way in talking to her individually. It could never have happened in a general class crit.

Participation and Need for Control

Lederer: Some teachers use class crits also in the manner of a general forum simply as an open discussion. That, to my mind, can go too far, and expose students--who pay so much for attending the classes conducted by a person with experience--to a good deal of loose rambling for which not enough time was available. I much preferred the idea that the students would search out in asking questions whatever I had not succeeded to convey to a juxtaposition of their own thinking. I had once a quite rambunctious student who argued with me on everything I said until one day I suggested to him that he might possibly benefit if he would give a fraction of the energy that he spent proving me wrong to find out whether there might not be something that's right in what I said. With that said, he changed his attitude completely, and I never had a more devoted student.

What I sensed was that the students very often needed what possibly exists in Europe in an indirect way, and what I'm thinking of is the coffee house. Students in the studios in Paris or Berlin or wherever art schools were, would after

classes get together in a coffee shop and talk everything to pieces. And what do I know, the professor may have joined them there. The whole process of discussion of art and ideas became something loose and unstructured simply in order to hash out ideas. But at most art schools like this one, which is essentially a commuter college, that same thing could not happen; students and faculty dispersed after classes to far separated places.

In developing the Design Department, there came then another very important development (Am I too specific maybe?).

Nathan: No.

Background and Feel for Materials

Lederer: That was over the need to create a program that was not profession oriented, and that was meant to serve the whole school as a background. That is something that happened in most art schools in the 50s due to the influence of the Bauhaus School in Chicago. The old German Bauhaus, a famous school, had been dissolved by the Nazis, and some of their best teachers had come to America. They had a great deal of influence here--Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer.

Moholy-Nagy was invited to create a school in Chicago. That school never was quite the same as the original Bauhaus in Germany because it was created and influenced by industry and by commercial interests. For that reason, its true creative, experimental character never could unfold to the fullest. But the school established principles of teaching that had been employed in the original Bauhaus in Dessau, among them that there should be a study of all the materials used in creating works in the plastic arts. People should get a feel for all the materials with which they would work.

Classes at the Bauhaus therefore were taught by both an artist and a craftsperson. Well, from all this what filtered down to the art schools in America was that they should have courses in which students, regardless of what their future aims were--sculpture or painting or graphic design or crafts--should get familiar with what is color, what is form, what is structure, and in which way the properties of various materials used influence the form that is created. Underlying

was the idea that all the arts have a common source--a language.

To incorporate these ideas within the basic design courses that had been taught in a sequence of courses that were to stretch over two years, was a considerable task. But since it sailed under the name of basic design, it became my responsibility. It entailed a great amount of work because these classes were to respond to the needs of all majors that were offered at the college, the various crafts, painting, sculpture, and, of course, those of the professional design areas, with multitudes of all sorts of different aims. It was a big chore. I had an assistant, but as far as the program itself was concerned, and the formulation of the courses, and the planning--all that was my responsibility.

I would like to insert here a brief description of these basic courses that was published for many years in the college's catalogs.

Catalog Description of Basic Courses

> The premise on which the Basic Studies program has been developed at CCAC is that there is a language of the Visual Arts and that an understanding of this language forms a basis for whatever studies, forms of expression and explorations in arts or crafts or design a student may want to engage in. The nature of these studies while continuously vitalized by new developments in arts, science and technology and colored in the presentations by individual teacher-personalities, is not determined by current trends in art and esthetics. The Studies are meant to lead to a discovery of these resources that contribute to the creation of art in all its manifestations, of all times, all places, all cultures. Furthermore, these studies are to educate by leading to an awareness of the thinking and attitudes that determine the artist's work and his development, his relation to materials and tools, his work habits and his desire for independent exploration.
>
> Such Studies although they will cover essentially the same ground for all students will not lead to uniform results. Individual students with their vastly differing intellects and sensibilities,

backgrounds and education, interests and abilities, will extract, carry over into their future work and retain what reveals itself as meaningful to them.

On the other hand, these Studies provide a common ground of experiences to which all teachers in the following years, regardless of their disciplines, can refer. Ideally, these studies should tie together the many strands of interests represented in the College and create interrelations between the studies in various departments.

Nathan: Were you essentially full-time at the college then?

Lederer: I should have been, but I was there only on Tuesdays and Thursdays from the beginning to the end. I had my studio at Wine Publications in San Francisco, and I certainly wanted to maintain my work there because that was the only way I could do it. I would not even have thought it was right to teach full-time because it would have gotten me out of touch with the experiences that shaped the background of what I was teaching.

College Growth and Program Changes

Lederer: So that gives you a summary description of a lot of struggles, ups and downs, and difficulties as they occurred. With so many new people coming in to teach suddenly at the college, of course the intimate cohesion that at my beginning there existed came to an end. I would certainly not want to say everything worked out right and smoothly always, the way it should, but the effort was serious, and ultimately one had to come to terms with living in an imperfect world here, too.

Well, then at the same time the programs towards specialization in graphic design went on, and ultimately led to splitting graphic design and illustration as separate majors. Furthermore, we added a section of industrial design and even one for interior design.

Nathan: Was that related to the architecture?

Lederer: Architecture wasn't there yet. Interior design could not be thought of without some kind of architectural understanding; that was introduced the same way that industrial design required a great deal of engineering know-how. Industrial

design was dissolved after some fifteen years of struggle with that subject, trying to really do something with it. I asked to have it dropped when I realized that we could not do it justice for lack of space and equipment.

I am altogether aware that in much of what I did in dealing with the faculty in my department, I used more--let's call it with a nasty word--dictatorial ways than is often desirable in our democratic society. But that was simply the only way for me to cope with a practical or time problem, in order to get anything done at all. I must say that I became aware of that only when I met a former colleague at a party after I had retired, who insinuated that jokingly to me. I thought back and thought, "Well, he probably had a point there." But it cannot have been too bad because throughout my relations with the faculty remained excellent, and the instances of unpleasantness were exceptions. My colleagues, together with alumni, sent me into my retirement with such warm expressions of affection, appreciation and acknowledgement that they totally overwhelmed me, and I still hear from quite a few of them now after ten years. Maybe I wasn't quite such a bad tyrant after all.

Nathan: Would it be true that all of the faculty in a sense practiced the same pattern that you did, they taught part time and also practiced their specialties?

Lederer: Yes. Well, it is actually very much what you have in most art schools. Painters spend their time in their studios, sculptors in their sculpture workshops. In our case, all the teachers were practicing designers, with the exception of Carol Purdy, about whom I talked earlier, who could rely on many years of experience as a professional.

Should I talk a bit more about my procedure of teaching, my philosophy?

Nathan: Yes. I think that would be very useful. Somewhere along the line as you talk about your philosophy, eventually you might want to say something about how developments in technology affected teaching.

Lederer: Developments in technology, like the technical changes in printing and in the production techniques, had of course to be introduced. The changes in the design and handling of type, so firmly established for five hundred years since Gutenberg's invention that led to printing from movable type, have been startling in the past thirty years and required that we teach

a new way of thinking about type as part of design and printing production.

Nathan: --or even color, the color separations?

Lederer: Color separations and all technical and practical matters were introduced to the extent that they can be grasped in classroom presentations and demonstrations. They were expanded by field trips to design studios and printing plants. A real working familiarity with any of these processes can, however, only come from continued learning and practice on the job. Too much is often expected in this respect from hiring professionals to teach, as they are not aware of a student's capacity for grasping all the information that comes from all sides during the few years in college.

Nathan: Right. Are you ready now to go back to philosophy and teaching?

Schools and Clear Choices

Lederer: I always thought that seniors in high schools with interest in the arts would benefit if a clearly pronounced profile of various art schools would be available to them so they could choose the school that could respond best to their talents, temperament, or aims. I feel very strongly that the art schools in America all try too much to do the same thing. For example, if a person wants to become a graphic designer, that student may not want to be distracted by all kinds of philosophies, may not want more teaching of literature, but may want a school where he or she can learn graphic design in order to graduate in three or four years and get a well-paid job.

The Art Center School in Los Angeles does a topnotch job of preparing people for the profession. Nothing else. They made that very clear when they even advertised at one point: "Come to us. We have no library." Proudly. "You do not have to read books when you come to us. It's all practice." To me, this was pretty shocking, but still, there it was and it was pronounced clearly. It would certainly not have been my choice as a school. But few art schools present their image so unmistakably.

In the meanwhile, due to government support for institutions with college degrees, too many institutions try

to hang on to the addition of the term "college." By now the Art Center is also a college, managing that by association with a university for liberal arts classes. But that does not make a truly integrated program.

This is understandable, due to the pressure of economic conditions. Schools have to live on students, which is different from the state-supported schools in Europe. That is a big question and goes, of course, for the whole cultural life in the United States, including museums and symphonies and opera.

But you asked for my philosophy in teaching design and illustration. I have already spoken about the need of preparation for the profession in which alone a student's further growth can come about. In the broadest sense all art education--and I make there no distinction between the so-called fine arts, craft, and design--can only prepare a ground from which to grow. Their education should help students to develop in whatever direction they want to go later on. Like all education it should also lead a student to grow as a human being by gaining insights into more than just the needs of the profession as it is being practiced at this very moment. I mentioned the Art Center School as following a different concept, and I fully accept the possibility of such a different attitude, even if it is not mine. But I think that within any art school a coordination of dominant ideas about goals of education should prevail so that with all the variety of individuals as teachers the students are offered guidance instead of confusion.

At this very moment--from what I hear, since I'm still in touch with people and friends and alumni at the college--I hear that they are very strongly steering towards getting a more clearly defined profile for the college.

Nathan: I see. You mentioned also that when the GIs came flooding in, that the top number of enrollment was something like 1500. How did it stabilize?

Lederer: It stabilizes now around 900. When we had meetings, trying to define what we would consider the ideal number for the kind of program we have and the kind of facilities we have, that was the number that we came up with. So that the college can still keep the feeling of cohesiveness among the faculty, and yet have enough of a student body to support what fortunately,

ultimately came about--an adequate scale of faculty compensation.

This college has lived for eighty years without any state or city support, and that, in itself, is a quite extraordinary achievement. As far as the customary support by society leaders in the community is concerned, the place of the college in Oakland put it at a disadvantage compared to San Francisco with its traditions and tremendous background of culturally oriented wealthy people there.

In the East Bay, on the other hand, Berkeley has always had a community whose cultural interests had a focus in the university. So it's a quite remarkable thing in the history of American schools that this college could exist that long, supported almost exclusively by tuition.

Talking to Administrators and Board Members

Nathan: You were speaking about your relationship with your faculty and with the students; would you care to say something about your relationships to the administration and with the board of trustees? Did you have any particular relationships there?

Lederer: Well, I always tried to explain what we were trying to do to the administration as best as I could, and I cannot say that they ever were in my way, but I certainly often did not get very much real support. Like, for instance, in quests for better studio facilities; that became a rather sticky thing at times when the quarters for teaching design and all the equipment were absolutely insufficient. There were the usual promises, and nothing happened. It depended, of course, very much on individuals and their particular bent of interest and experience.

There was one president who had a background in design and a great deal of interest in that area. For a while I thought, "Now we are getting somewhere," but he did not stay very long, and so it went with a great deal of up and down. I cannot say that, apart from expressed appreciation or good will, enough happened to vigorously support the development of the Design Department, which for many years actually was the main breadwinner for the college. The faculty assembly had always one faculty representative on the board. I was that elected member of the board for two years. My relations there were very good, although I had once an unpleasant repercussion

WOLFGANG LEDERER — FOUNDER, CCAC SCHOOL OF DESIGN

In the late 80's, the American Institute of Graphic Arts noted, "The focal point of graphic work is no longer exclusively New York City. California has evolved into a significant design force....The California look indicates stronger individual styles, color vitality, and freedom of spirit." This shift has come about, in part, because of Wolfgang Lederer, founder of the School of Design and faculty member from 1941 to 1980. His design philosophies and management of the departrment over the years laid the foundation for training a core of designers on the West Coast who now are being recognized nationally and internationally.

The arts and crafts tradition which founder Frederic Meyer had established at CCAC supported Lederer's approach. "The idea that the arts belong together, and you don't have to say this is where one thing starts and another ends, appealed to me very much," Lederer explains. "When Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, he was given a project where he had to fit into certain architectural shapes, he had to make it visible from a great distance, he had to illustrate certain stories from the Bible, and it had to be understandable by the people. How is that different from what orher communicators do?"

Lederer says that design always comes back to communicating certain basic things about society, and in order to have a vision behind the design, the designer must understand society. "When you talk about the world in which the graphic designer lives, it is a world that the designer must understand in all its phases. If you take art as one of the most visible expressions of society in a certain time, whether negative or positive, then you realize that the graphic designer cannot be a person who is apart from the world, whether it is political life or personal life, etc. Students must be brought in touch, not only in the means of doing their work, but also with their world."

Guiding design principles that Lederer stressed in his teaching and in his personal practice were clarity in presentation, regardless of style, method, or execution; clarity of type, so that the type works with all the other elements in the given space; the discipline of careful observation; the deep traditional roots of design; and "decency" in design, i.e. being responsible to the large groups of people who will see the work. "It is not necessary to use vulgar words or vulgar design concepts just to attract attention," he emphasizes.

Lederer's career began with formal education in the book arts in Europe. Studying at the Academy of Graphic Arts, Leipzig, the Academie Scandinave, Paris, and the Officina Pragensis, Prague, Lederer spent five years learning from the European masters and designing books that were his works of art created with someone else's words.

He emigrated to the United States in 1939 to escape the growing Nazi threat in Europe. On a trip to San Francisco in 1941 Lederer met Frederic Meyer, founder and President of CCAC, who was familiar with Lederer's work and had an opening as an instructor of two classes: commercial art and advanced design. Lederer accepted the teaching position, and the beginning of a long association had begun.

Gradually broadening the scope of classes and curriculum, Lederer became Director of the Design Division. In the meantime, his signature style — simple, clean, "not flamboyant or showy" — began to attract the attention of the University of California Press and the burgeoning California wine industry. Winemakers were becoming more aggressive about promoting their product and for 20 years, Lederer was the Art Director for Wine Publications and Western Farm Publications in San Francisco.

Although he has been retired since 1980, Lederer has been "as busy as ever" designing for UC Press, Presidio Press and Chronicle Books. His influence also lives on in his students.

"I still practice what he taught me," says Bill Yamada '73, Executive Vice President and Creative Director of Wells Rich Greene/ BDDP in New York. "He was ahead of his time (in the design field) in asserting that concept and ideas drive the design, and in fact, were crucial to any design project. You must have a vision. He would not allow us just to be technicians, because we were in his classroom to improve our minds."

Clarity and discipline were the hallmarks of the Lederer style, both in design and in teaching. "I can still hear him say 'Make the round things round and the square things square,'" says Ken Lavey '48, Creative Director and Vice Chairman of Lavey/Wolff/Swift in New York. "He has a keen awareness of the dynamics of design; he exposed students to all types of techniques, styles and design and insisted that our creations begin with fine craftsmanship and work up to the final artistic product. By sheer persistence and discipline he brought out the best design work in me."

Thomas Morley '61, describes Lederer's influence as very profound. "He helped guide me in the direction most suited to my abilities — book and publication design. I studied typography with him. As a teacher, he was also very important. I modelled my subsequent teaching after his approach." Morley taught at the Maryland Art Institute. His first job in publishing was as designer of the much admired American Heritage Dictionary. Summing it up, Morley said, "Finding one's way in the professional world is not an easy task. Wolfgang helped me in that search."

It is appropriate that the department Lederer worked so hard to

build is now in the hands of one of his students. Recognized around the world for his work, Michael Vanderbyl '68, is Dean of the School of Design and principal in Michael Vanderbyl Design. Even as he trains the next generation of designers, Vanderbyl acknowledges the foundation laid by Lederer. "Historically, the department of design is based in the arts and crafts philosophy of CCAC," he says. "Due to Wolfgang's leadership, those roots are very strong."

Just as a good designer understands the world in which he functions, so does the CCAC School of Design understand the contribution of Wolfgang Lederer in its evolution. Regardless of style or influence, "good design always stands on its own," says Lederer. Hallmarks of the aforementioned California design — all hallmarks of so many of Lederer's students — are echoes of his teaching and design principles: clarity, concept, and craftsmanship. ■

in a meeting when I felt honor bound to make the faculty's point more strongly, and they didn't cherish that too much. But these are all asides.

I was maybe a bit too sympathetic in my reaction to economic problems that I don't understand myself. [laughter] I will gladly admit that as a shortcoming on my part. If I had been able to understand the economic situation of the college better, maybe I could have made my points more forcefully. Whether that would have been successful is another question. What in contrast to my experiences is happening right now is simply due to the fact that there is a very enterprising and very energetic president who has a good deal of understanding for all matters concerning the role of design and is able to push them in the right direction.

Design and the Visual World

Nathan: That was really interesting.

I didn't want you to lose your thoughts about your philosophy of education.

Lederer: Well, when we come back to a philosophy of teaching itself, I always felt that I want to give my repercussions to what a student presents as much as possible based on not just my personal feelings, but based on what I would say are the reactions of human beings to the visual world. I tried to enrich my own mind by reactions to what we see and experience in all forms of plastic art, all periods of art, all techniques of art. In other words, when I said something about whether an appearance or way of handling is right or wrong in a student's work, apart from specifics, when we talked about aesthetic choices or judgment of placement or judgment of color, in the back of my mind I evaluated that against what I had experienced in looking at prehistoric cave paintings or against Gutenberg's *Bible*, or Picasso's *Guernica*. I attempted to evaluate by using the experiences gained from an immersion in the plastic arts of all times, and not only those derived from a narrow area within a limited field as practiced at this very moment.

That is what I feel one can really talk about, as an approach that is diametrically opposite to the idea of teaching design as a fashion. It is this evaluation that made it difficult for the students and for myself. If you are

somewhat educated in the arts, you can always find in the back of your mind a period or an artist or a particular work that has been done that contradicts what you are saying, and has done it beautifully or effectively. So you have to be very careful in the choice of your examples. It makes it undoubtedly difficult for the student to understand that if you show an example from a different field or an earlier time, you are talking about something that can show ways of handling that are applicable to learn from in our time.

It is much easier to be taught, particularly in the field of design--I would not want to talk about fine arts, because it is out of my area of teaching--and much more easily grasped, if you present only what the great practitioners in that particular field at this moment are doing. That's the thing to do if you want to be successful. Now, if you are a famous name designer, like Vanderbyl, you do that indirectly because the students know you and your work, they can see it in any graphic design publication, whether it's Japanese or European or American. There he is, with his influences on the image of design as it is practiced today.

If you are with Lederer, it's different, also because I wanted something different. I wanted to get the students away from the emphasis on the way their work should look, and to clarify the design problem behind the assignment they were asked to work on. So I presented the students, when I gave them a poster assignment, with examples of posters by Toulouse-Lautrec, or Cassandre or any one of the many great artists of the past who had done something fabulous with that particular design problem. I wanted the students to see it not to find out how their poster should look, but as an example of another artist coping with a similar problem.

So that was my idea. I had a vast collection of wonderful examples elucidating almost any point that could come up in an assignment or in a student's work. My collection included much of the best work of contemporary and past illustrators and designers. Whatever I showed them--I did not want the students to think (although they did think it too often) that this is what I wanted them to do. I was trying to elucidate concepts, while the students often took what they saw too directly as an illustration of the way their work should look.

The Approach to Design

Lederer: Maybe this is appropriate: I could give you an example of how I approached the whole idea of teaching advertising design. At the very first session, I gave an assignment for the next session, with only one day in between: do a hitchhiking sign. It is a simple form of communication. You want to be taken along to go maybe to Sacramento, and you stand at a corner. When the students brought in what they had come up with, it sparked a whole discussion about "What is design?"

In order to be effective, a hitchhiking sign has to be an arresting image, which somebody who drives by at speed can grasp. That is number one. What form of lettering was used? What color? What have you used to support your idea? Can all that be taken in in that short a time? In other words, the whole question of "Do you like the image or do you not like it?" falls by the wayside with this as the overriding principle.

How is the image organized so that all parts can be seen together? And again, the idea of composition as something that should make a "balanced" image becomes subordinated to the question: Can one see all parts together in a short moment? There enters psychology: the question, who would want to take you along? How do you convey that you are maybe a person with whom it would be fun to ride? So this little assignment led to a discussion of what we are talking about in design in endless variations, with endless specifics. Design starts out by defining what the problem is, rather than what picture do I want to make. That's the essence of the whole field. If the students could grasp that, they were on the way. Whether they could also answer the problem imaginatively, whether they could do it in a spirited way, all that came later.

Practical questions about usage of the sign entered. If a student came and had prepared a sign that could be easily folded and maintained, all the better. That student had obviously given thought to the idea that he/she might often want to go to Sacramento. The essence of the whole discussion was for the student to grasp that a designer is not there to make pictures for enjoyment, or to express himself--a term, incidentally, that I detest--but to communicate under given conditions.

I could elaborate on the subject of communication by showing how Giotto, with simple gestures of figures on a

fresco high up on the wall conveyed scenes from the holy text to the illiterate, or how the overly ornate interior of a baroque Mexican church shows the possibility of a better world to the poor peasant. With examples of this kind, I tried to get across that the effort to communicate belongs to the artist's endeavors and that the emphasis on it in illustration and design is in no way demeaning.

It may sound as if with this approach to teaching design and illustration, I had gotten my students away from what they were heading for, namely, what is called "the real world." But, actually, in my own work I was continuously involved with the real world, and what I had my students work on were problems from those experiences. When they participated in contests sponsored by commercial organizations, they were always successful in competition with other schools. At one time the St. Regis Paper Company had a national contest for package design, an important competition with very good prizes. The judges selected students from my classes for the gold, silver, and bronze medals. Incidentally, at that occasion the first award winner and I were flown to Chicago for three days as guests of that company. It was the only time in my life that I have flown first class.

Should I give another example?

Nathan: Yes, this is very good.

Lederer: I had students do covers for series of books. In other words, if you go to the bookstore and recognize there is a book in a series in which you have already known another book, you liked it, and you liked its presentation; you recognize it as part of that series. At the same time, you recognize that this is a volume that is new within that series.

Again, the student was confronted with a clearly stated problem and had to analyze how to balance the elements of continuity against the elements of newness. The success of what he or she was doing was not evaluated on the basis of "I like it or don't like it" because of its aesthetics, but simply on the basis of whether it answered the stated problem: To what extent did the repeated elements of appearance of cover design emphasize the series balanced against the new aspects of that volume?

Responsibility of the Designer

Lederer: Ultimately there must be also a discussion of the responsibility of the designer as part of educating future professional designers or illustrators. I did not accept the old idea that if you are working for clients, you do what they want. You listen to clients to find out what their needs are and as a designer you answer the needs with your particular skills. But if the client wants something that you cannot live with, there must also be the word, "No."

A telling example for students: I saw once a book jacket for *Lust for Life*, the biography of Van Gogh, a pocketbook edition on which a redhaired painter was shown, painting a lush female nude. Now Van Gogh never painted any nudes. If he had painted one, I am sure it would not have been a lush one. That was a total falsification. This is where one has to draw the line, and I felt it was very important to impress that on students.

Student Responses: American and European

Lederer: Well, I think that covers that area, unless you have any particular question there. Let me see--I made a few notes. Well, there are a few questions that you asked me about the nature of the students and their respective responses--Europe again versus America.

Nathan: Yes. Were there Asian students when you were teaching as well?

Lederer: --Asian students, oh, certainly.

Nathan: I wondered whether there was a difference in the culture?

Lederer: As a group--I'm very loath about generalizations--but as a group Asian students certainly had a tendency to be very highly disciplined. That generalization, I think, can stand because it really goes back also to their double education, the two schools that they attended and other culturally ingrained traditions that make them respond to education. So I could single them out.

There were a good number of black students, and, in my experience, they represented the same broad spectrum of high

intelligence and low intelligence, and great talent and little talent, like all the other students but with considerable professional difficulty to be expected later on, that white students in that way did not have to meet. The same thing was true, of course, though to a large extent changing now, of the women who took those classes. These are things that there was no way of gainsaying. It simply was a fact of the life at one time.

You asked at one time about the responses of European students versus those in America. What set American students apart is that they feel much freer to debate the merits of what you offer them and not behind the teacher's back, as I had known it. And then that they expect things to happen quickly. In Europe, people are used to the concept that everything takes time. I remember that when I started at Arts and Crafts, there was Marguerite Wildenhain, a great potter teaching ceramics. She was also fairly new at the college, coming from Germany. She told me once in great desperation, "Well, where I was brought up, we had to spend a whole year simply to get acquainted with what clay is, and here I am asked to teach in one term how to make ceramic bowls."

In a positive way, on the other hand, there is the tremendous readiness of Americans to pick up things. This is what I have experienced in meeting young people who suddenly take an interest in graphic arts and pick up things by observing other people's work, by studying books, by going to an evening class, and by simply trying it out. It is amazing. There is the development of a great practitioner and one of the greatest names in American book design, Adrian Wilson. I don't know how it is today, but certainly it was unthinkable in my time, growing up in Germany: he simply by coincidence got acquainted with a printing press and typesetting equipment, fell in love with the equipment, with the whole aura of all that is around it and, being highly imaginative, wonderfully intelligent, incredibly dedicated, developed it to such an extent that it is totally miraculous.

So there are always these two things--in one way this wonderful idea of Marguerite Wildenhain, that you should intimately and slowly get to know the very thing with which you shape the objects that you devote all your life to. On the other hand, there is this readiness to pick up and do--often with wonderfully fresh results and successful ventures into the new, unhampered by too great dependence on the way things had been done traditionally.

I am full of admiration for people who simply jump into something new and do it enterprisingly and very often very well. I think these are basic differences in the process of learning, and it would be wrong for me to pronounce one or the other as the right or wrong way.

Fighting Shoddiness and Recognizing Limitations

Nathan: Would this be the place to say a little about bridging two cultures, and what the message was that you wanted to bring from the European culture to the Americans, to your students? Did you feel any mission at all?

Lederer: Yes, that's a good question. My early youthful idealism certainly had a sense of mission. What I still strongly believe is that education at an art school should emphasize that it is worthwhile to do whatever you do as well as you possibly can. In other words, fight shoddiness--shoddiness in thinking, shoddiness in execution. I think that's what I tried to show to students, who after all in the majority are not great geniuses, and without any false humbleness, I consider myself belonging to that group. Also, that we are all limited and that we have to make the most of what we can do within our limitations.

As a matter of fact, this is a phrase that somebody said at one time. I think Braque, that all development in art is based on recognition of one's limitations. I oftentimes have quoted that to students, and most of the time they took very unkindly to it. [laughter] That word, "limitations," did not sit very well with them. I still feel that it is what all great artists really have done. If somebody has a little contribution to make by having a superior sense of design or color or whatever it may be, if that is set forth by a desire to let it shine forth as well as it can, I think this is a good goal to strive for, and its realization has meaning, regardless of how large or small a person's creative gifts are.

The Average Student or the Elite

Lederer: In spite of the name designers who were at one time my students, and whom I like to proudly mention, I believe that

the real test of the success of a school of art or design is what has been achieved in guiding the average student to a realization of his/her potential, rather than stressing that somebody who had a tremendous lot on the ball also went to that school. The highly talented people--one might well imagine--would have gotten so much out of their own resources and means of finding guidance by example or reading or observing, whatever it may be, that the contribution of the school cannot have been that essential. Whereas the contribution of the school to the average student is, of course, very big when it allows that student to find his/her place.

Philosophically, in very broad terms, it brings up for anybody who is involved in education the big question, "Where do you draw the line?" In other words, when do you start creating a proletariat in design or in the arts? Do we flood the market with people who are not good enough to do really excellent things? I think this is a real question. As a human being, I cannot accept that some people be condemned for non-participation as long as they do what they do to the utmost of their creative, technical, and intellectual resources.

This touches on an area that I can hotly debate to this very day when I get together with younger colleagues. There are some of them who find my attitude totally unacceptable.

Nathan: Do they wish to go for the elite?

Lederer: Absolutely. They would want to, already at the beginning, by rigid entrance requirements and portfolio submission, create barriers for the only modestly gifted people to even start out there. There are people I have discouraged from going on in the field, but when I discouraged them, it was always on the basis of my observation of their lack of psychological readiness to be part of a field that makes certain demands on human beings that I sensed they were not made for. There I felt a responsibility to point that out to them. If they felt, "Let him talk, I want to fight that thing through," my response was, "More power to you."

Nathan: Could you talk a little bit more about the individuals who you feel are not suited for commercial art, perhaps.

Lederer: May I correct you?

Nathan: Sure.

More on Attitudes and Issues in Graphic Design

Lederer: I would not like the word "commercial" to be used, because "commercial art" is a term I abhor. I know it used to be called that, and it has always left a wrong connotation with the idea of our work. There is fine art, which sounds as if it were something decent [laughter], and there is commercial art, which sounds like something not quite decent. I know that in the public's mind that is something rather widespread. The graphic designers at the college, for instance, were very often going around with a chip on their shoulders or with a defensive feeling. Their colleagues in fine arts saw them as people who sell out.

I hope with everything that I have said already, I have conveyed that in everything we graphic designers are doing, we are imbued--or I certainly think we should be imbued--with a tremendous sense of responsibility, because what we are doing is, in terms of influence on the public, much more widespread than in general what the so-called fine artists are doing.

Nathan: Thank you. Now, may I rephrase this?

Lederer: Please.

Nathan: Were you saying something about those you feel, your students, who may not be suited for graphic design?

Lederer: Oh, yes.

Nathan: Could you sense this when you worked with a student?

Lederer: You do, when you get to know them. I gave a class assignment to design a poster for wine, something I happen to be familiar with. There was a student who said he would not want to do that because he was definitely against alcohol, and I certainly respected that. As a matter of fact, I knew a very prominent art director in a big agency who refused to have anything to do with tobacco advertising.

Such convictions are possible. On the other hand, if a person is continuously in conflict with the nature of work that is to be the answer to a specific assignment, then this person is not made for that field. Or if the demands about certain limitations--to use only two colors; or to have to work in a particular format--bring a person's creative juices to a standstill, then that person has to find other outlets for his or her talents, no matter how great they are, rather

than try to become a graphic designer or illustrator for publications.

If I sensed that kind of attitude, I certainly pointed it out to the student. On the other hand, if he or she seemed basically right for the field and balked at the idea of what I call "give and take," then that person, too, had to accept it and take it, not as a sell-out. The word that was anathema so very much to students was "compromise." Yet I still have to find the designer, the prominent designer, who not at one time or another has given in, including such a monumental genius like Frank Lloyd Wright. His early designs for the Guggenheim Museum looked different from what he ultimately did, quite obviously under the influence of discussion that had gone on.

Where you draw the line is purely a matter of personal conscience, like everything else that we are doing in life. Even if we wanted to do the best, there are situations when our resistance wears down or where we try to accommodate certain demands that we cannot agree with, simply in order to see a project finally come to fruition. But I can only say that this is ultimately a matter of personal conscience, temperament, needs, whatever you might call it. It certainly is something that should be aired.

Those instances where I consciously talked people out of getting into the field were well-received, and some people to this day keep reminding me of it with a great deal of gratitude. I also believe that all this probing and discussing is part and parcel--now we are going back to talking about education--of what I described as the kind of education that an art college should offer, and thereby widen a young person's outlook towards all aspects of life.

Nathan: Yes, I see. When you spoke of needing to cultivate and develop each student as a human being, how did you feel about letting your students get to know you as a person? Was that a part of your approach to teaching--that they would understand you and your standards?

Lederer: Well, I think if you talk to people, what you are comes out with every word you are saying. Certainly, students are very alert to whatever quirks a teacher may have [laughter]. I do not see how that could possibly not enter. An impersonal approach is not possible, not if you are really feeling warmly and strongly about what you are saying. You are talking about the very things that are close to your heart.

As a matter of fact, at the end of my very first term when I had met these new American students, I felt so humble in front of them in some ways. I knew that I had approached them in a way that was not what they were normally accustomed to. I gave them a little talk about what this had meant to me, and how it had been for me and what I think the outlook towards our work should be. Afterwards, a girl in the first row said to me, "It was just like in church." [laughter] So if you talk about being warm about or personal about what you are doing, quite certainly that must come through.

So, you see, when we get from conducting classes to meeting the demands of the profession, we get to deeper questions of what the meaning of all education is. I felt the meaning of the education should be that individuals are enriched for whatever it may be they might be doing the rest of their lives.

At the same time, I would only find it right that they tried to use their naturally given abilities, even if limited, to the greatest extent possible to make a contribution that could fit into this world. That the demands of this world are not always necessarily the best, we all know, and yet I think that in a small way, anybody can contribute by doing something that is, if not great, at least decent. Now, again, whether decent is sufficient or whether it should not really be excellent, that is a to-be-or-not-to-be question.

Nathan: Thinking of your humanistic view, if I can call it that, did you feel any responsibility to try to help your students get jobs, or to introduce them in the field?

Lederer: Very definitely. If they were students who I knew would fit certain organizations, I would recommend them that they apply, or if I knew of somebody looking for somebody, I would call that person to describe a suitable student. That happens still to this day. I had a good sense to recommend only people who really seemed to fit an organization. For me this was a nice way of doing to others what had been so very helpful in my early experiences in America.

The nicest story in that respect is that I had a very good, highly talented student, Ken Lavey, who went to New York and who didn't know anybody there. I sent him to a person who had a firm for pharmaceutical design in New York, Mr. Froehlich, whom I had met when I was working in New York. Ken Lavey got a job with him, the usual apprentice kind of relationship, and within a few years was vice president of that organization. [laughter] By now, Froehlich has died, and

it is now Lavey, Wolf and Swift--a prominent and excellent design organization that handles pharmaceutical packaging and promotion all over the world.

Only in recent years has the college systematically attempted to follow the careers of its graduates. For lack of a list of those who graduated with a major in design or illustration, I want to add here just a few names that could serve as examples of different directions in which various students who got their degrees from the design department developed in the professions. Art Abel, advertising agency art director, San Francisco; Robert Bechtle, advertising designer, now a leader of the Photo-Realist School of Painting, Oakland; Michael Bull, realistic illustrator, San Francisco; Tomie de Paola, world-famous children's book illustrator, New Hampshire; Maria Epes, art director, book designer, artist, New York; Mel Furukawa, advertising and children's book illustrator, New York; Lowell Herrero, for years one of the most sought-after humorous advertising illustrators, San Francisco; James Lambert, illustrator and book designer, New York; Ken Lavey, design director, Lavey, Wolf, and Swift, package and promotional design, New York; Steve Reoutt, designer, illustrator, art director; Michael Vanderbyl, graphic designer, dean of design, California College of Arts and Crafts.

Breadth of Viewpoint vs. Style

Nathan: So you were able to evoke something different from very different people.

Lederer: Totally different. That's the whole point, you see. As it happens in some schools, when you go to students' exhibits, you know who their teachers were. If these teachers happen to be pacesetters today, as it is being practiced today in design, that kind of pronounced style is a strength for that moment. But the question is, how does it go on?

I started my classes by telling my students, "Style doesn't interest me very much." Now that's a very risky thing to say, but I added it doesn't interest me very much because I have not the faintest idea how the practice of design will look by the time you graduate. I still maintain that's right.

Michael Vanderbyl was certainly not educated by me to do what he is doing today. [laughter] But somewhere it had to

start, and what all schools can really only do is prepare a ground from which to grow.

So whether it's designers or illustrators or graphic design-oriented people or package designers, they all came from classes that were oriented toward a broad viewpoint.

Design and Responsibility

Lederer: You asked me a moment ago whether, coming from Europe, I had some sense of a "mission" when I started teaching here. Maybe it was that I tried to instill in all students a sense of responsibility towards themselves, a desire to do things properly, to do things as well as they possibly could. I wanted them also to become aware of their responsibility towards their communities or country, wherever their work would be seen.

I used to do a good deal of talking in this way in the early days of my teaching, but later on I toned that down because it didn't seem to sound quite right. It sounded a bit like preaching. But I still feel that designers have a tremendous responsibility by contributing to the quality of life in the world in which we live, because their work is seen by many more people than the work in museums. It is on the billboards, in magazines, in books; it's in the street, on TV; it's everywhere.

If designers could bring to our disorderly world a greater sense of order and beauty, then they would really do a great thing. I think I did not preach as much about that any more because I came at times to think of it as rather hopeless. The avalanche of poorly done illustrations, books, billboards, packages, et cetera, that we are flooded with is so great that I sometimes despair whether anything can be done to stem that tide. I am satisfied if it at least happens in some enclaves, or certain areas where people respond to it. And I still feel very, very strongly about that. With the abundance of talent and creative ability available, quite particularly also in this country, I cling to the hope that some day young people can be educated to direct their energies towards not only saving our environment, but also to direct their talents toward making it more beautiful, and that this should include to a much greater extent what reaches our visible world in all forms of printed matter, on TV and in the life of our cities.

Debate with Jo Sinel

Lederer: I remember an evening with round table discussion at the college of a group of commercial artists, as they were called then, talking about their field. The way this field was presented for the students rubbed me terribly wrong. I felt beholden to get up and have my say. In my English--it probably sounded at that time even more like German than English than it does now--in any case, I expressed my dismay. Then a gentleman in the audience with bushy eyebrows got up and said, "Well, that was a very eloquent, idealistic viewpoint expressed, but, of course, Mr. Lederer doesn't realize the facts that we are confronted by the attitudes of industry and commerce in this country."

Well, he made a very strong, wonderfully worded statement, and I felt I had to rebut that. That went on for a little while, with me jumping up and the other responding, until somebody in the audience said, "This seems to have become a debate meeting between Mr. Lederer and Mr. Sinel." What I did not realize was that I had confronted Jo Sinel, who is known in the history of American design as "the father of industrial design." He was a very important and influential man who for the first time taught industrialists to accept design as a crucial part of their whole scheme--the sort of thing that, later on, in a flashier way, Raymond Loewy did.

Jo Sinel really was the first one. After this rather acrimonious debate between me and this experienced practitioner, we met later on again and became good friends. As a matter of fact, we were both at the International Design Conference in Aspen, where he got up in front of the great audience from all over the world and berated the participating designers for the poor work that they were doing as compared to the excellent work that he had recently seen in a student exhibit of my students at Arts and Crafts.

Nathan: How wonderful.

Lederer: He became very interested and later taught in the industrial section at the college. He even had the plan that he wanted the students whose work he had seen, to stay together and form an alliance as a design group that should be headed by me, with him as a sponsor-promoter; but organizationally that never got off the ground. There was no money, the students were too impatient, and I didn't have the time to devote to anything of that kind.

Nathan: Is he alive still?

Lederer: No, he died. When he introduced himself in this little impromptu talk in Aspen, he did it as "Jo Sinel, independent designer." He wanted to emphasize his being alone rather than working in a big group with an organization as it is common today.

Nathan: That was interesting recognition.

Lederer: You asked how to prepare students to compete in the marketplace--what do they need to know?

They have to be good. What they have to know about the marketplace is what they have to soak up by being interested in business. If they detest business, they cannot work well in that area. In later years, when the hippie movement was very strong, there were always students who wanted to explain to me that to do advertising meant doing shoddy things. I always told them: "That's why you are here. You have an education so that you realize when something is shoddy, you do not accept it. Advertising is communication. It's telling people what's available." In many areas, we depend on advertising for information.

Order, and the Danger of Absolutes

Nathan: We were speaking a little more about orderliness, and you had another thought?

Lederer: Well, I mentioned in general terms how difficult it is to make statements in front of a class--and you have to make statements, you cannot qualify everything because it would create confusion, even if at that same time at the back of your mind, you always know of contradictory experiences. While orderliness as a basic thought is so very strong in my mind, I also know, of course, of the danger of orderliness running into boredom.

Nathan: Predictability and--?

Lederer: Predictability or repetitiousness or designs just being orderly but boring to look at.

The other tremendous difficulty I have with orderliness is, of course, the horrid experience of orderliness in

Germany. We cherished orderliness in our surroundings but have to come to realize that the same orderliness was used in Germany in the disposition of human beings in gas ovens. That is the other side of the medal. I say all this in order to emphasize that while I tried to convey things of a broad nature as a basis of an education in a direction that I had experienced and that had enriched me and been meaningful, yet I was always aware of how things can go wrong. It made me skeptical about being too definite about principles.

That, of course, makes teaching so difficult. On the other hand, you cannot educate by qualifying everything you state. The same thing is true in college education as in children's education. You set certain goals that you find are admirable because deep down you believe in them, even if there have been adverse experiences. Now, I do not know whether any statement of that kind belongs into the oral history. I really rely on you there, whether you think that it is too pompous or too big sounding. Please tell me.

Nathan: This is an integral part of your character as a teacher and as an artist. It's worth saying. I don't think it's pompous.

Lederer: It certainly is something I have continuously struggled with--being torn between things that came naturally to me and that I would pronounce, holding up the banner even if I had seen them fail.

What you said a moment ago encourages me to tell you that there were also things that I felt quite certain about, so that I repeated them very often over the years. Maybe I should quote a few of these.

Teaching and Human Experience

Lederer: One subject that came up often in classes is "good composition." I tried to tell the students always that there is no such thing as a "good composition" in art and design but only an arrangement or order of all elements that supports what the artist wants to bring out. A composition is good if it does that.

I tried to emphasize that we can only react to what we see as human beings. If ants or birds have an art, it must be based on different kinds of reacting because they see things from different angles than we. If I call a vertical line a

line of firmness that has a basis in our way of standing, and the horizontal a line of rest, that is not a personal interpretation but a reaction as a human being.

Kandinsky has pointed out in a book that I often quoted that to put a horizontal into a rectangle means that you have created a subject matter, because you have created the concept of sky and ground. It's interesting that this observation comes from the artist who is generally considered as the originator of nonobjective art.

What I very often came across was that students tried to justify a confusing appearance in a design as arousing curiosity and for that reason, intriguing. I told them, "Confusion is not intriguing." [laughter] It is the same in an illustration; lack of clarity in representation is not subtleness. I used as example the illustrations of Odilon Redon, so full of subtleness and mystery, yet how clearly stated they are.

At my retirement farewell party, a well-known designer who had been in my class recalled my appeal not to make designs which lacked definition by telling the audience, "When I work, there is something in my ears that Wolfgang has said: 'Make the round ones round and make the straight ones straight.'" [laughter]

To talk about letter forms offered a wonderful source to study forms that are not naturally grown but are manmade and have an established tradition of appearance. The letter "A" upside-down is not an imaginative interpretation of an "A." It is not an "A" anymore. In analyzing design, I often discussed the number of means employed: how many forms, how many directions, how many colors, how many contrasts. All these are basic means of design. Depending on the richness of the total concept, all these means can be used but not all of them with the same emphasis if they are not to create an endless jumble. That's something that one can point out in teaching visual design. The student can learn to use more or less of one or the other element for the sake of letting one or the other speak.

There is a wonderful illustration by Matisse in his book, *Jazz*, showing in the suggestion of cut-out shapes and in very strong flat colors a carriage drawn by horses. The subject matter in this case is only a means to tie the play of forms and colors together. If this were meant as an illustration of an actual scene, having as its theme the same subject, the colors and shapes would be all wrong. If it is the interplay

of all elements and what they do for each other that justifies the abstraction and simplification used. A discussion of whether forms and shapes are right or wrong, whether I like them or not, would be totally pointless.

I tried to pick out a few things here to illustrate the idea of teaching design by distilling essential judgments from our natural reactions as human beings. That's what I would always try to bring out. If you see a rhythmical line, and that rhythmical line has to overcome contrasting elements, and it overcomes them, we find that that rhythmical line is more interesting--the way we find a horse running over a hurdle more interesting than a horse just running along.

I often used the example of a landscape of fields by Van Gogh, going very much into the depth. Van Gogh used in the foreground a very intense vermilion for some poppies. He used exactly the same red on some roofs that are far, far in the background. It is impossible to see these two reds as equal, because you experience the one as belonging to the foreground, the other one as all the way in the background. So you relate differently to them. It indicates that what we see in an image is enriched by our experience in its subject matter.

Subject Matter, Nonobjective Art, and Illustration

Lederer: I do not believe that what we look at can ever be free from associations in the same way as we hear music. I even maintain that our reactions are enriched by the suggestion of subject matter, also in modern art, where the subject matter has become frequently a subordinated concern.

Nathan: Are you suggesting that the painting is its own subject?

Lederer: The painting is its own subject. Right. A nonobjective painting can be a tremendous thing, like a Josef Albers or Rothko, and can be in its own right wonderful, because it has within it the scheme of forms that are free of associations like squares, or almost free of associations like a square and pure color. It can have an unbelievable richness to it. But as soon as subject matter enters, something else enters. For anybody who does illustration, it is important to come to terms with the question of subject matter, because the illustrator has to see his place in the world of visual experiences that today are very much influenced by experiences in nonobjective art. What is usually taught in illustration

happens to be largely based on experiences in the Western world. It is an outgrowth of the Renaissance and the experiences of observation of nature, perspective, foreshortening--all matters that come from the Renaissance.

But that should not exclude an awareness that there is in the world of the past and present as much illustrative work being done that comes from totally different worlds, let's say the Japanese, Persian, African forms of illustration, which are just as valid. But the Western world is the world in which we happen to live, and in which I had to assume the students would want to work later on as professionals. In teaching, I could only offer something based on the Western world, although if a student with a totally different background had shown up, I believe I could have coped with that, too, by relying on what I know of basic human reactions to the visual world that exist in spite of differences in cultural backgrounds. Which brings up the question--I don't know whether that belongs in here--of free choice of courses for students, which was brought in in the 70s in response to students' insistent urging.

Nathan: Is this concerning core curriculum?

Lederer: That's right, yes. Interestingly enough, while the course requirements and sequence of courses were taken apart in the last ten years while I was still there, they have now come back full fling. We talked about changes being undertaken quickly and sometimes also too quickly. I am sorry for students who happened to be at a school or were studying during the years when these old things were just being taken apart, before it had been found out that the new ones really didn't work too well. There are quite a few students who were left with a mixed-up sort of education.

Nathan: That is a hazard.

Lederer: For that reason, holding in the reins may be in the long run still the better thing, although the new thing might sound very adventurous: "It sounds interesting, let's try it."

[Interview 4: July 5, 1988]

Nathan: Today, do you have more to say about the college?

Lederer: Yes, I did not know whether I talked about how it ended for me towards my retirement.

Personnel Changes and Reorganization

Nathan: No, I don't think you did.

Lederer: All right. In my last five or six years there, I gradually reduced my teaching activities, and also passed on the chairmanship to a former, very gifted student, Steve Reoutt, whom I had brought into the department as a teacher of graphic design and illustration. After his graduation, he had a career mostly in the East. Both he and the recently appointed dean of design have moved as professionals into directions that are quite different from mine. Yet, it allows me a pleasant sense of continuation to remember that at one time I helped them on their way when they were in my classes.

VII LIFE IN ART, AND FREELANCE WORK

Lederer: Now I have actually to jump back and go back to my beginnings in California. In the nearly forty years I was at the college, I was there only two days of the week and the rest of the time I was doing my own work. When I started out, I thought of my own work mostly as drawing and painting, and this is also what I did for a while. I made drawings of a good many city scenes of San Francisco, and of people and also developed a great interest in the ballet as a subject. When the interest in ballet in America started, Harold Christensen had a school on Van Ness Avenue, where I had gotten permission to sketch, and also in Katherine Dunham's classes.

One-Man Shows

Lederer: I had two one-man shows during those early years. One was at the old Elder Gallery and consisted of drawings and watercolors, mostly of New York and of San Francisco. It was very well reviewed, particularly by Alfred Frankenstein, the art critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who commented that "...he is a latter-day Suydam, but a Suydam with a bang."

The other show was at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in which I showed illustrations and graphic design. Again, I had very good reactions. This show, by the way, was arranged by Douglas MacAgy, assistant to the director, Grace McCann Morley. He later became director of the San Francisco School of Fine Arts, where he had a great influence in setting the scene for Abstract Expressionism in California. I also showed with the San Francisco Art Association. All pointed towards establishing myself in a broad way in the Bay Area.

I should mention that I was rejected by the army when the war broke out because of my poor hearing. I tried to get into

a war-related work by taking a special drafting course for engineering drafting, but I found out that was absolutely not something I was made for. I felt, as a matter of fact, downright humiliated by finding there are all kinds of people who had never held a pencil in their hands before, who suddenly were able to do these mechanical drawings with a great deal of skill and understanding that somehow totally escaped me.

After two years in San Francisco, I got married to my friend from Vienna, Hanni Hirschberg, whom I had come to visit here originally. Now, with children coming, the college was by no means sufficient anymore as a source of income.

Europeans and the California Wine Industry

Lederer: I had become acquainted with Alfred Fromm and Otto Meyer, who, with a tradition of wine production in Germany, had been asked to develop the promotion of the products of the Christian Brothers Winery.

When I had come to New York originally, I was surprised to see in the subways big posters that talked about the drinking of wine as an accessory to pleasant living, as something to complement meals. I couldn't understand these posters in the least. They didn't advertise any particular wine; they only talked about the pleasure of drinking wine. Coming from Europe, to see that one would have to advertise the enjoyment of wine was a very odd thing. It was at that time that the wine industry in America really began to assert itself and tried to influence the consumption of wine in competition with hard liquor. After all these years, it is very evident how successful this campaign has been.

There was a third person, also a refugee from Germany, E.B. Wienand, who had taken over a publication called *Wines and Vines*. E.B. Wienand wanted a new cover design for that magazine. He felt that the old one was not attractive; a typical European attitude, you might say. He had just taken on a new publication, and the first thing he wanted was that it should look good.

So I designed that, and gradually there were more tasks for that magazine, design of advertisements, and advice on typographical questions. Soon he started a second publication, the *American Wine Merchant*, and needed

considerably more help since, like all trade publications, the magazines existed on sold advertising space. I produced layouts for advertisements to help with the sale of advertising space.

Nathan: Were both these journals intended to cover California, or were they national in scope?

Lederer: They were both national and had totally different emphasis. *Wines and Vines* talked generally about growing vines and producing wine, and *American Wine Merchant* generally about ways to promote, sell merchandise, and advertise wine. After three years, I was made art director of Wienand's organization, called Wine Publications, which by then had a third publication added, called the *Grape Grower*. Once a year, Wienand published the *Annual of the Wine Industry*. So there was a great deal of work, handling these three monthly publications, graphically, with editorial design, illustrations, and the layouts for advertisements.

In addition, this activity got me in touch with various people in the wine industry. Over the next twenty years or so, I did a great variety of work--trademarks, packages, brochures, advertisements, labels, flyers, name it--for the Christian Brothers winery, Paul Masson, Charles Krug, and other wineries. A few labels I started from scratch, in other instances existing labels required revisions or additions. My new design for Charles Krug was very successful, and its logo is still used after all these years with some slight transformation.

This activity provided me with necessary income--my two sons, Tom and Andrew, were born in 1944 and 1946--and also offered interesting activities of a great variety. I built up a storehouse of practical experiences, particularly in the areas of advertisements for trade journals, package and label design, brochures, and also in producing camera-ready art.

Nathan: Did you work in color?

Lederer: Yes, depending on the nature of the work. The publications, with exception of the cover, were all black and white except for occasional two-color advertisements. The cover of the *Annual* was a full-color design, which I handled with a very complicated system of color separations for four different inks by producing four separate black and white renderings that coordinated in overprinting to achieve the necessary mix and blending of colors.

One would not do that today because in the meanwhile, the handling of the four-color process has been simplified to such an extent that this exorbitant amount of work with these separations would not be warranted anymore. But at that time, there was a great deal of penny-pinching necessary in the production. So I did a good deal of technical work, too, to help these projects along.

This was not the kind of work that I really wanted to do most, but since there was hardly any book production in California at that time, it was certainly a field in which it was possible to do a great variety of work and work of good quality. Working with and for E.B. Wienand, I worked with a highly cultured person. He happened to agree with me, although we never had any philosophic session on that. By tradition or upbringing, we agreed that whatever one presented to the public should bear the stamp of quality and should be decent-looking.

We worked contrary to the idea, "Simply hit them over the head as long as they get the message." And, I think that in the process we really proved our point. The advertisements sold, the journals flourished; so the stress on quality in no way interfered with the aim of the publications--to make money for the company.

There were other people I worked with, and they all enriched my acquaintance with working procedures in many fields. For instance, I worked with Irving Marcus, who had a reputation as a famous football star way back, but by now was a very good writer and editor at Wine Publications, a man who had occupied himself with the production of printed pieces since his youth. He had a very clever, shrewd, down-to-earth mind that gave me a good deal of insights in many areas of work that I would not have gotten otherwise. We became friends, and in turn, I met in his home a number of his friends who, with varied professional backgrounds, contributed very much to my understanding of American life, in particular, also of the political scene. It was the beginning of a fuller understanding of many areas, and also the beginning of some of our long-lasting friendships in this country, which up to that time had been rather restricted by newcomers' natural tendency to find access easier to people who had backgrounds and experiences similar to their own.

Another person of interest at Wine Publications was Tom Weber, a photo-journalist, who later became well-known as a roving reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, where he wrote provocative articles from various corners of the world.

The Clients' Concerns

Lederer: What I was often confronted with--the very problem I tried to explain to my students--was how to deal with the clients, how to work in the face of sometimes unreasonable demands as far as the quality of the design or the sense of the design was concerned. I learned in the process that the one thing to avoid in contact with clients was to talk about design with them. What I tried to talk about were practical matters, the things that concerned them. In other words, if you advertise something, where do you advertise it? To whom do you advertise it? What are the surroundings on the page? What are the viewing conditions? What sets your message apart? If you can do this, you get the client to accept you not as a decorator, or as a person who wants to palm off art ideas on you, but as a right-hand man who knows what this particular printed piece is meant to achieve.

I find the process of producing something and wanting to sell it and thereby make a living a totally honorable kind of activity. Like any human activity, it's often shoddily handled, but that does not mean that in itself it is a shoddy activity. That also applies to advertising. To tell people that something is available, to describe it in attractive terms so that they would want to look at it closer, is in no way a bad thing. I depend on it in many areas. Most of my information on new tools, available paper, or equipment, comes from advertisements.

If I say this now, I must certainly forget a host of negative experiences, but you can have those in any field. I certainly objected strenuously to the idea that, as it is sometimes thought, "If you are an artist, you do what you want to do. If you are a designer, you do what the client wants you to do." This is pure stupidity. The client has needs, and they should be understood, but the client cannot tell you what you should do. If a client wanted to show me the way he wanted the design of whatever it was to look, then I wouldn't play. It doesn't make any sense.

Words and Illustrations

Lederer: I have always found that a good client is the surest way to producing good work. A good client relies on you as the person with the experience to translate his needs into a

graphic image. We are dealing with communication, and we, as designers, happen to be interested in communicating by visual means. That goal starts with words. For that reason, a full understanding of what copy is to convey is extremely important.

And I'm now not talking about books. That is a chapter all of its own. I found often, when we had sessions where people were groping for clever slogans, I might simply ask: "What do you want to get across?" A simple answer to that question often made the best slogan. I must add here that in discussing approaches to advertising, I have confined myself to the type of advertising with which I gained a personal working acquaintance in these publications. There exists another vast area, in which the big advertising agencies play such a tremendous role, and that is the building up through advertising campaigns of images that in the public's mind set products clearly apart that actually differ in name only. Many aspects enter into the making of these sometimes gigantic and long-drawn-out campaigns and go beyond my personal experiences. Personal experiences are the only thing I want to talk about here.

Nathan: You were saying that copywriting intrigued you, and you became interested in the words?

Lederer: Yes, the words. Well, my interest in illustration also started with the words, with the words of authors. But in the case of advertising, the connection is, of course, much more direct. It has to be as direct as possible. On that basis, I could involve myself with more than just doing the visual amplification of the words, but considered the words an integral part of the whole design.

Graphic Design and Inherent Conditions

Lederer: All this goes back to the basic idea that our work as graphic designers starts from certain conditions that are inherent in the nature of the task. We have to understand the nature of the task to the fullest in order to come up with a creative response that answers the needs of that task. But I do not consider that a confinement.

If that is a confinement, I consider it a welcome one, because instead of having to sit down at my desk and try out 500,000 possibilities, there is a certain area within which to work. There is a crucial difference in approaching your desk as somebody who wants to make a drawing based on something that appeared in his or her mind in the night and wants to develop that, or whether you want to respond to the specific task.

I am trying to put a bit complex story into a nutshell, but it's still the basis on which I would educate young people towards design or illustration. If they could grasp that difference, if they could accept that, and if they found it intriguing, then they were made for that field. If they have lots and lots of ideas but find that given conditions were in their way, then they have a problem. So I tried when I met new clients to find out from them as much as possible about their product or the direction of their message or outlook, but I did not ask them, "Do you like this kind of design or that kind of design?"

Nathan: Did you find them forthcoming?

Lederer: Well, that varies with as many people as you meet. All of them, if you ask them questions that go to the heart of what they are concerned with, will be forthcoming. They want to get that across to you.

Wine Labels and Product Use

Lederer: I had once an experience, since you asked that question, that was radically the opposite of what should happen. Somebody gave me a long spiel that he wanted a wine label to be the most refined and delicate and European kind of label imaginable. I thought, well, now I have found my man, and I can do the thing exactly as I would want it to be, namely with a European tradition, which without making differences in quality judgment, is a totally different one. I might want to say something about that afterwards. But in any case, when I presented my sketches, he threw up his arms and said, "How can one see that from half a mile away in a supermarket?" [laughter]

What I wanted to mention before is the changes in approach that the wine labels themselves reflect in relation to the nature of the change in the uses of the product. At

the beginning, wine labels were a mixture between the traditions that one was familiar with from Europe, but at the same time infused also with a desire to make its point in the competitive market conditions as they exist here.

In Europe, a wine label is essentially a decorative addition. People buy a wine by its name and even by the year, because they know which wine and year were good ones. When they put that wine on the table, the elegant label adds to the feeling that you are drinking something precious. To convey that is the essential task of the label. Whereas in America, with wine being introduced at that time more or less as a daily commodity, a different attitude had to prevail, and people had to be made to see, to even discover the wine in the store. In order to be successful in advertising, that label had to be effective in a reduced size, clearly showing it as different-looking from those of the competition, in black and white.

At an early time, Jo Sinel, whom I mentioned before as a very influential designer, designed some labels for Petri that were absolutely stunning, but they were not different as eye-catchers from a label for soap.

The interesting thing is that now with wine being so much part of the "in" scene, the labels have swung back all the way, and they feature sometimes the most delicate, sophisticated, restrained designs which tell the customers that this comes from a winery where they really know what they are doing, and most likely they do it in their backyard. [laughter] So there are differences in attitude that the history of wine labels has gone through which is sociologically an illustration of something that has been going on in one particular area of a commercial development.

Nathan: I might pause to ask you a question. You were becoming involved in the development and promotion of wine at a very early stage, and I wondered whom were you trying to reach then? Were they people who drink beer? People who had never drunk wine?

Lederer: I tried to reach the people who were addressed in the promotion that was set forth. The message and whom to reach came from the client. In other words, if the promotion said: "We are so big a winery that we can produce our wine inexpensively, and, for that reason, it is for everybody," I would try to bring that message out as strongly as possible through whatever illustrative or design means I could think of. If the message was, on the other hand, "We produce only

for a select group of people," the design approach would be geared with a sophisticated audience in mind.

Advertising of wine was handled by large advertising agencies with their copywriters as part of image-creating campaigns. Advertisements for *Wines and Vines* or for the *American Wine Merchant* covered more specific areas of production, quality, and distribution, because these publications went exclusively to the trade.

But as far as label design is concerned, there certainly were definite differences to be considered. The Christian Brothers wanted to reach a very wide audience. Paul Masson was already then directed towards a much more select kind of audience. That certainly made a difference. I hope that I did make it clear that the difference is not one of taste in the handling of the design. Jo Sinel's Petri label that I mentioned just now is an example of an excellent design that was definitely meant to say, "Wine is not a fancy thing," and it did it extremely well.

Clients and Their Styles

Lederer: You had some very good questions: What sort of framework do clients provide? Do you participate in decisions? Do you offer alternatives? All these questions are impossible to answer in general terms because the differences in how various organizations approach the designer are tremendous. Sometimes, it can be a one-to-one person thing, and sometimes it is meeting with a whole group of people. Sometimes, they are willing to spend a good deal of time with you; sometimes, it has to be done in a very limited amount of time. So, one cannot really make very good generalizations there.

The essential thing, I think, is that as a designer, one has to be prepared to meet all kinds of people and to react to different attitudes in different ways. I find that very interesting, and contact with people stimulating. To deal with different people means that even the same tasks, that in themselves might seem the same thing--another label with different words--become each time a new kind of task.

Nathan: A very interesting and good answer: it is a different problem each time.

Lederer: Yes, working with different people who have different attitudes and aims.

Well, there are other tasks where the difference is inherent in the nature of the task. I can work on fifty different books with one design director or one publisher and will have fifty totally different tasks because fifty different authors speak to me. Even if it is not possible to actually read each book that you design, some reading in the manuscript provides insight into contents, style, and tone. In that case, a variety of people as clients is not necessary. As a matter of fact, in that case, I would even say sometimes that is a blessing because you do not have to each time readjust your thinking or your attitude or your approaches to what you are doing to the reaction of a different person.

What I am saying here is something that works for me, and certainly not every designer, by any means, works that way. There are very excellent designers who present their work in a much more demanding way and scare their clients by saying, "Well, I'm the person who knows what you should have, and I know how to do it well, and that is it." That can be very effective. As a matter of fact, it can be helpful when clients cannot make up their minds or are uncertain about decisions. But you can only do what is given to you temperamentally to do.

I certainly prefer what my experience has been, doing it my way even if it kept me on a smaller scale of operation. I also prefer a direct contact with a client to having a representative who gets the work, brings back second-hand information that he or she has tried to cull from the client, and tells you what to do. Now, for many designers or illustrators who find contact with people difficult, or that it makes them nervous, or who don't want to spend the time on it, to have a representative is excellent. A representative can be very much the given thing for a person who specializes in a certain type of work, like illustrators who work in a certain style for which they are well known. In that case, they are happy if they can stick to their desk.

Varied Design Tasks in the Wine Industry

Lederer: I am still thinking of certain tasks in the wine industry. The wine-related tasks were so varied that even at one time I designed an exhibition for the Wine Museum. Alfred Fromm had

at that time created that museum in San Francisco to show there his collections of objects of an historical nature connected with wine. I had already designed catalogues for the wine museum, but at that time there was to be an historical exhibition.

Nathan: I remember seeing the exhibit of wine vessels, cups.

Lederer: Yes, it was wine vessels and drinking glasses. I designed large showcases for that exhibit with big three-dimensional backgrounds and display stands giving these objects a historical reference. It was a fun assignment of a totally different nature from what I usually do. Obviously, with a background and an understanding for the needs of design, one can answer all kinds of demands.

As a matter of fact, currently it is very much the trend anyway for graphic designers to also go into display design and showroom design and things of that kind--all of which can be an outgrowth of their work.

Nathan: While we're thinking a little more about this, I had a note about your serving as art director of Farm Publications.

Lederer: I did not go into that. Wine Publications was at one point sold, and I stayed with E.B. Wienand, who then developed Farm Publications, offering me the same opportunities to work in the various fields of graphic design and communication and advertising and cover design and layout for magazines, but it was, as far as the aura of the subject matter was concerned, much less alluring than wine, which has certain traditions and romantic associations.

Working for those publications had definite limitations in what could be done, particularly with the design of the publications themselves. I handled each issue essentially as an individual production; that means not with a standard design into which everything would fall, although I established a basic image for each publication. But, of course, the nature of the stories was repetitious, the printers and typesetters we worked with were not the greatest and were geared to fast production. So what could be done was achieved with a good deal of effort, but it could only go so far.

Then this work also came to an end about 1965, through outside circumstances that changed the course of my professional life in a fortunate way.

Career Changes, and the Realm of Books

Lederer: That certainly meant a good deal of inner struggle for me, including the struggle with the idea to go back East where the book field was, but with a family now I did not have the courage for such an undertaking. What held me back was certainly also my Europeanness in wanting to go a safe and prescribed path from one thing to another. I am certain that most of the people I came to know who had grown up here would have changed their path when it did not satisfy them anymore.

VIII BOOKS, CARDS, AND QUALITY OF PRODUCTION

Lederer: When Wienand retired and sold his business to a midwestern firm, there was no further place for me in that, and probably at the best moment possible, this area of my work ended. Meanwhile, my sons, who had gone through college and both spent two years in the Peace Corps, were on their own, so I could do work that was less renumerative. What had seemed to me such good pay when I started to work for publishers in New York at my beginning in America looked different to me by now.

Back to Book Design

Lederer: I went back into book design. I approached various publishers and made contact, and over the years have done much work for Chronicle Books, Presidio Press, Sierra Club Books, and others, and particularly also for the University of California Press. What had happened meanwhile was that some of the book industry had moved West, while the main book production, the main publishing houses, the main offices of most of the big publishing houses still remained located in the East. There were some publishers that started out here, particularly college-book oriented publications. Those have grown since then, and the publishing endeavors of the universities, Stanford and California, that had at one time started as a prestige kind of activity for the universities, had become solid publishing enterprises.

Nathan: What other things are you thinking of now?

Lederer: Other things? Well, books.

Nathan: And fine journals and scholarly journals?

The Glories of Letterpress

Lederer: Journals and books with a level of production where a certain class of style and quality of printing in itself is an issue. Fortunately, I found almost at the beginning of my commercially oriented endeavors a young printer, Harold Berliner, who already in his school days had, as a side avocation, started printing and had gotten his schoolmates to help him with the production of Christmas cards that he sold. I saw a little exhibition which featured some of his work and sent him a few of my designs. I think I mentioned I designed regularly Christmas cards for the American Artists Group and others. He liked them very much and asked me to do work for him.

Out of this humble beginning of doing cards, which he printed and produced very beautifully, developed, together with the growth of his typesetting and printing shop, a large number of tasks for me over the years. This has been going on for--let's see, we roughly started in '45--for over forty years.

Harold Berliner has, in the meanwhile, increased his shop's activities considerably and has a wonderful setup in Nevada City. The shop handles a great variety of tasks, partly on order, partly initiated by him. He has a vast store of special molds for typefaces and ornaments and decorative pieces that he has gathered over the years. He even offers an extensive service of producing Monotype typefaces for typesetters all over the country--typesetters who, like him, have an interest to uphold the glories of printing letterpress, which by now, with the dominance of offset printing and computer type production, is something that has become a specialty, a craft rather than a commercial enterprise.

It is wonderful to be part of these activities which, amazingly enough, Harold Berliner always has maintained as a side activity, being primarily a lawyer with a big law firm. As a matter of fact, for a number of years, he was district attorney in Nevada City. He is a tremendously vibrant, active, and enthusiastic person. Sometimes, it meant that projects took a long time to see the light of day, but it's always wonderful when it happens. For me, it was a more than welcome outlet as a side activity in addition to what I was doing in my daily work. It led ultimately to the production of considerably more than just Christmas cards. There were brochures; there were posters, broadsides, and ultimately,

Review from Fine Print

Harold Berliner's Typefoundry

224 Main Street
Nevada City, California 95959

Memo to the Mountain Lion. 1984. Designed by Wolfgang Lederer. Printed by Harold Berliner. 47 x 32 cm. Lutetia types on Curtis Ragston paper. 750 copies, $30.

A political message is presented by Wallace Stegner, the Pulitzer-prize-winning author who has lent his name to many environmental causes in the San Francisco Bay Area. Memo to the Mountain Lion is a beautifully written essay addressed to that animal, an apology for human action against it and a plea for sane behavior toward it. This is a long piece, five paragraphs of text, difficult to place on a single sheet so that it still entices and, up closer, reads well. Wolfgang Lederer, the designer, has chosen a traditional rendering of the work: title at the top, name printed following the text, colophon in one line at the tail of the sheet.

The piece is lovely, in perfect balance with itself and with the sheet of paper it rests on. At the top, Lederer has drawn the mountain lion, evidently stalking unseen prey along a green vine; the initial letter *O* of the first paragraph is partially superimposed over the image. There is a distinctly medieval approach to the illustration in both use and scale. This is made fresh and contemporary by its juxtaposition with the title of the essay, which is set in two lines in capitals and lower case rather than in the all capitals one might expect. As befits the idea of a memo, the text is set ragged right (a little too ragged in some instances). A more formal touch is added by beginning each of the four succeeding paragraphs with a capital letter printed in a second color (the russet used for the initial letter of the text). This color is also used to emphasize the central message of the text: "If we cannot live in harmony with other forms of life, if we cannot control our hostility toward the earth and its creatures, how shall we ever learn to control our hostility toward each other?"

Stegner's name is added at the bottom in the green of the vine at the top of the sheet; this and his residence are printed in small caps. The printing, while it doesn't sparkle, is certainly competent and beautifully registered; the edition is quite large, numbered for some reason but unsigned, printed on Ragston paper and not made to be more than it is. The work, analyzed by its component parts, seems at first to be contradictory—formality mixed with informality, medieval image and contemporary titling, stylized type and mostly casual style of writing. Yet taken as a whole it is compelling, strongly designed and meant to be read, a credit to the talents of designer and writer. K.W.

also, books like one that is in production now that is devoted to some fifteenth century songs, which I have illustrated with fifty illustrations, all in color, a very enjoyable and ambitious project.

Nathan: Yes, it is. Now, I'm assuming that we will come back to your interest in book production.

Lederer: Oh, yes, book production as such. I only wanted to indicate this work as something by which I maintained some kind of a balance to the type of work and various activities in connection mostly with the wine industry.

Nathan: Either here or when we start again, I did want to ask you a little about your choice of lettering and your choice of paper--whether this is part of what you did, let's say, in the brochure design.

Lederer: Yes, it certainly enters there, although it entered with considerably more possibilities later on when I got back into book design; then the choice of paper could become very important, although it is primarily a responsibility of the production department in the publishing house.

In the work connected with trade publications, the choices were often restricted by economic considerations. Choice of form or style of lettering, like that of illustration, is of course part of the design. As far as typefaces are concerned, the choices were frequently limited by what the print shops had on hand. The vast array of typefaces that has become available now as part of computer-driven equipment even for very economic production, was not available at that time.

Travels and Graphic Design (1955)

Lederer: What I also wanted to mention is that after the war we started traveling, and I enriched my life and my observations considerably by traveling in various parts of Europe. I saw what was going on in graphic design in the various countries we visited--Germany, Italy, France, England--and also visited some of the art schools. I remember, that was in 1955, so that was only ten years after the war, I got into West Berlin, where I visited with my father and my brother. I went to a

school that was roughly the equivalent of the Oakland college here, and I was quite overcome by the spaciousness, the orderliness, the equipment--how that all was kept. It was ten years since this city had been battered to rubble. It gave me an idea of the recuperating force at work there that later, of course, led to the tremendous economic development that one has seen in Germany.

Nathan: I wondered whether you were mentally comparing the work that students were doing in West Berlin with that done here?

Lederer: No, what I saw was not sufficiently revealing there, because my visit there was during vacation time. I was shown through the place, and I saw the facilities, but no work.

But I remember, unforgettably, that I visited once in Zurich the very famous Arts and Crafts School there. I entered this very spacious, beautiful building with vast corridors, elevators for faculty only, and walked through corridors with doors hermetically closed. Then I came to an open space where two faculty members in white smocks, the way doctors here wear them, were putting up an exhibit of students' artwork, placing some package design into display cases. They would put a piece up and then step back, evaluate its placement, and then an underling who was standing nearby with a feather-duster came forward and dusted each piece when it was placed.

Thinking of the confusion, turmoil, participation, and activities that went on when we put up exhibits, I thought it could not be more of an illustration of a different world than seeing these white-clad gentlemen, who looked like medical doctors, and their helpers with the feather-duster, arranging that exhibit of students' work with no student present. [laughter] This little scene revealed an entirely different world to me. The Swiss are leaders in design education, and they are doing something to look up to. With its rigidness, it would not fit into the American scene, as the little scene I observed made quite evident.

Apart from that, I traveled in Europe to get to know things that I had not known before. Except for visiting my family, we avoided Germany most of the time because of the unpleasant feelings lingering in our minds. Mostly, we veered towards Italy, where we felt very much at home. I did an abundance of drawings in streets, and parks and museums, wherever I saw things that fascinated me because even in a small sketch, I experienced impressions much more intensively than by mere observation. Every one of those many hundreds of

drawings brings a full recall of the scene and its environment.

This sketching led later on to a very nice assignment. Everywhere I had drawn with great enjoyment old hand-made toys from all over the world, which I love. The richest experience I had was in ten days of almost uninterrupted drawing in the Girard collection of the enchanting Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The owner of a new toy store, Heffalump, in San Francisco, saw these drawings and asked me to become the illustrator of a newsletter that he is producing. But these travels had really no practical aim beyond enriching myself by looking and drawing. The collections of these drawings are simply in a number of portfolios and only quite occasionally have I shown them in exhibitions at the college or elsewhere.

Nathan: I wonder whether you had ever gone to Mexico?

Lederer: Yes, I have twice been in Mexico, and the same thing happened there. There, too, the experience of what one sees in the streets as well as in the unbelievable museums, and the monumental pre-Columbian sites, is something that has had a tremendous meaning, opening a new world for me. I think of the anthropological museum in Mexico City as probably the most beautiful museum in the world. I call it a place of worship, rather than a museum, in the way that one experiences great art there. What I feel about all great art is that it confirms a sense that life is not a paltry thing. Watching the reverence of the Mexican peasants contemplating with awe the wonders of their past deepens that experience.

I always felt that the greatest arts have always been connected with life and people wanting to communicate something. They used a place, or an object, or a situation in life to which the thing they were creating was a contribution, a way of enhancing their daily or religious life. Of course, in Mexico you find that so very strongly not only in the objects in the museum of the past with all their ritualistic meanings, but you find it also in the incorporation of the startling contemporary murals wherever you turn.

Volunteering in Graphic Design

Lederer: In a way, that corroborated very strongly my feeling about our role as designers, contributing to the life of the people among whom we live. I had reduced my workload when I retired

from the college and decided to contribute in a more, how should I say, direct way by involving myself in volunteer work as a graphic designer, trying to help organizations with whatever skills and abilities I have. I wanted to help them put out their communications in a better form. This proved sometimes quite difficult because one is accustomed to working with people who deal with you as a professional and are themselves professionals; you can establish a rapport on that basis.

You know what they are talking about, and I know what I am talking about. In dealing with lay people, this can become very difficult. I found them sometimes very, very nice, and very unusual as human experiences, but also at times enervating and in a way that stymied me. In many instances, my chances to make a contribution were limited by amateurish reactions and an inability to listen to experienced advice.

Nathan: Did you work with Geoff Link?

Lederer: I wanted to talk about that. The group is called San Francisco Study Center. The center is a nonprofit organization that is set up to help community groups to get their stories out in a professionally presented, inexpensively produced manner. In this case, they put out a good number of printed materials which benefit from well-organized, well-thought-through presentation. Since I was taken on their advisory board, I took my role in this case with less shyness about hurting feelings and hurting very personal involvement of individuals to preconceived ideas. I could have some influence with advice and with the individual pieces.

In the meanwhile, this organization has expanded its activities with a section called Community Graphics, and they have some very good persons working there. I maintain contact with them and participate in meetings of the Board of Directors.

Fascination with Magazines

Nathan: To ask you another question--would you deal with the journals that you designed for Alfred Heller, *Cry California*, and *World's Fair*?

Lederer: That actually belongs to the whole area of journals. I have always had an intuitive interest in publications and

magazines. As a boy of twelve, I put out publications of all kinds of regularly issued material. The world of magazines with its variety of material--taking the word "magazine" literally--has a great fascination for me, and also the manner in which it is presented and how with all that variety, each time a definite image is projected.

So that when you think of a publication, you do not think of one appearance only, but you think of it as you would think of the appearance of a person. Whatever dress that person puts on, it is still always the same person. That goes for a publication which remains the same, although it is very important that each issue presents itself as a new one to the eye, which is different from the strictly individual appearance of a book, unless it's part of a series.

I have always welcomed opportunities to design journals and magazines, and one of the very enjoyable ones in that respect was *Cry California*. It had a very noble subject matter, to work on ecological issues and influence outcomes. It was handled by a man who had, by avocation, always involved himself in important issues that engaged more than a commercial interest on his part. He is Alfred Heller from an old San Francisco family.

He approached me at one time with the task of redesigning the cover of *Cry California*. I did this, and this was the beginning of a long, fruitful, and enjoyable association. Later on, he asked me to redesign the interior of *Cry California* and design individual covers, which went on for several years until the publication changed hands and totally changed its appearance.

Alfred Heller started a new publication, and that publication is the outgrowth of his personal, lifelong fascination with world's fairs, which he considers a source of endless enrichment and stimulation, and has followed and seen for many years. When he started that publication, he had already worked with one or two other designers trying to get from them an image for his new publication, but wasn't satisfied.

He sat down with me, and that is a good example of somebody talking about what he envisioned. In this case, his talk was enriched by his interest in and acquaintance with typography, which he had studied with Jack Stauffacher, the well-known San Francisco typographer. That gave, of course, a very rich and welcome background, particularly also his references to eighteenth and early nineteenth century British

publications. I designed that publication and received a very nice letter: "My search has come to an end."

Since that time--we are in the eighth year already--this quarterly publication involves me in the design of each issue. Essentially, what I had laid out at the time was a basic format and grid to cover all kinds of situations, but as it turned out, the kind of material at our disposal is so varied and rich that to really bring it to life still asks for individual answers. That's what I am trying to contribute there. There is wonderful historical and new material, and it's a very satisfying task to work on that.

Nathan: It's beautiful. Would you say that this publication has the refined, European look?

Lederer: It's meant to have that, yes. Heller started out wanting it to a greater extent to be purely literary, and was very strong in his intention that pictorial material should be very much underplayed. My dummies, what I presented to him, were certainly based on that idea. As it turned out, actually to show the beauty and the variety of what these world's fairs offer, particularly the reference to historical subjects, definitely invited the idea of using illustration more extensively, and I pushed that it would help this journal considerably.

Designing *Representations*

Lederer: Talking about these journals, I remember as one of my really interesting experiences my work on yet another one. Maybe I mix up things too much that way if I talk now about another publication that I worked on much later on?

Nathan: Please go ahead.

Lederer: A few years ago, I was approached by a group of professors at U.C. Berkeley who wanted their new publication to be designed from scratch. I met with them, all of them from various disciplines. They discussed with me the title of the publication, *Representations*, and that the nature of the articles would be a cross-fertilization between departments. It was a publication deliberately intended not to just stay within the boundaries of a certain department, which obviously was a new concept.

We talked about format and about all kinds of practical matters: the length of the articles; the nature of the articles; the kind of illustrations; the expected audience; and so on. With everyone participating, it was not easy to listen to and get the gist of what they were discussing. I had done other publications for the University of California Press, and I knew that this was an academic publication, and I know that these publications are not meant to be sold on newsstands. They are not heavily advertised and are certainly not meant to give a feeling of anything that is sensational or unusual. The design had to stay within the scope of what you may call a scholarly presentation.

After I had made the interior design, which involved imagining various kinds of articles, planning for different kinds of titles and all that goes with the design of the pages, I presented it to the group with a written outline of my ideas. The group went wholeheartedly for it, except for what I thought was the best part of it all: the cover. I had made a really very elegant design for the cover, but no, that was not it. It was not it because they felt very strongly that they were doing something rather unusual in academic procedure in emphasizing this cross-fertilization of disciplines, and they wanted the cover to project something that was quite unusual. I was dealing with a group of highly intelligent persons who continuously reiterated, "Of course, we don't know anything about design, but..." in all kinds of ways voicing their feeling about that publication.

I was very disappointed, but listening to them and looking at their faces, I realized that I had misjudged my clients. There were mostly young scholars, anxious that the publication should make visible that they were mavericks. It still had to be dignified, it had to belong in the academic world, but it also had to reflect their kind of attitude among other publications on the magazine racks in bookstores.

I had to make a U-turn designwise, in my thinking, which was not easy, because I had occupied myself with the other formulations. I had come up with something that I felt was very nice, very elegant, but it was obvious to me now that this was not it. In the process, I came up with a design, after a lengthy struggle, that the group fell for one hundred percent, and which has been--as they have assured me--an important contributing factor in what has become a great success story in academic journalistic publications.

Dealing with people of such intellectual caliber, I found extremely stimulating, even if the first reaction was

disheartening. This journal is now already in its fifth year. It's growing very strongly, and it is getting bigger each time I see it.

Nathan: That is remarkable.

Lederer: Yes. It's a real success story as far as journals are concerned. In the meanwhile, I have designed a computer publication, certainly a new subject for me, and designed others like *Nineteenth Century Literature*, the *Film Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Musicology*--all for the University of California Press.

Nathan: You were saying that your recent experiences with the media tend to make readers want pictorial presentations, rather than long, long typographical passages only?

Lederer: I'm observing that right now, particularly also in *The New Yorker*, whose publication I am extremely fond of. I do not know whether it will be able to maintain what has been its way of sticking to long, long articles which are to be read very carefully, often with sequels in the next issues. I would love to be proven wrong, but I am concerned whether it will work that way.

Vitality of American Graphic Design

Lederer: My interest in publication, and I talked about that at another time, and particularly also what is being done in America with publications, is something that I was acquainted with already in Europe, where I knew *The New Yorker* and *Esquire Magazine*. When we went to a coffee shop and saw *Esquire Magazine*, at that time in its huge size and with unbelievable lavishness of illustrations and wonderful paper on which they were produced, that really gave us an idea of what America could do in publications. In one way or another that also has remained extremely alive, the design of magazines. I have observed that and how their designs have changed, and the way they continuously change is to me still a source of endless fascination. In many instances, the design of magazines has gone the way of endless imitation of American models, as the perusal of French, German, Italian magazines on an international display stand clearly shows.

That is the other side of the medal. The leaders, the best magazines, have maintained a freshness and a willingness to each time go another step and try something new. That I find is totally stimulating and very wonderful.

Nathan: Which magazine do you find currently especially interesting?

Lederer: Well, there is one publication that is only known in our profession, called *Upper and Lower Case*, and that is produced exclusively for the promotion of an establishment in New York that produces new typefaces for the new computer-driven machinery. In order to interest designers all over the world in their new typefaces, of which they have an abundance, they show them in interesting articles and designs, and enlivened by provocative and startling illustrations and offering thereby a wealth of information.

There are other graphic design-oriented publications like *Graphic Print* and *CA* magazine, all of which feature the work of the best designers and illustrators. Certainly, all these publications have a very distinct profile. You open them and know you are in that particular publication. All that, of course, is the work of first-rate designers.

Nathan: Yes. I was thinking for the moment of *Sunset* magazine.

Lederer: Well, *Sunset* magazine has also a character, which in this case is very conservative and deliberately low key. In other words, the publishers obviously want to emphasize that everything presented is down-to-earth, and nothing is fanciful. They don't want to dress up this publication as something that it really isn't, just in order to titillate you for that moment. What they want to present is thorough, and down-to-earth and practical. As a deliberately low-key publication that has at the same time a great deal of character, I would rather mention *The Smithsonian*, which had the great Bradbury Thompson as its designer.

As a designer, apart from being just particularly interested in publications, to observe what has happened in America in the field of design in these years since I came here is a very exhilarating and fantastic story with many great and varied personalities. I think of--now we start talking names--McKnight-Kauffer, Ben Shahn, Leonard Baskin, Leo Leonni, Saul Bass, Charles Eames, Milton Glaser, Paul Rand. I name just a few of the multitude of names that have, each time, brought out another new aspect, a new direction of thinking, and have created in the process the most varied, imaginative, beautiful, exhilarating kind of world of images

that makes me sometimes wonder whether if the remains of this world will be dug out 5,000 years from now, whether they may not, maybe even more than a great deal of what is produced by the painters and sculptors really represent the creative peak of what America gave to the world.

This is not a prophetic pronouncement by any means, and it may still be what Jackson Pollock and other great artists in our time have created will be the remaining thing. But looking at the variety and the richness, the ability, and the inventiveness poured out in design and illustration, it certainly makes a startlingly wonderful image, and one that carried the message of America's vitality into the world. Whereas a great deal of what is going on in the fine arts today, and what I sometimes observe and read about it, leaves a certain amount of suspicion, and maybe a justification for my assumption that promotion and skillful marketing have more to do with some of its overwhelming success in the art markets of the world rather than its real value.

Again, I hear myself saying things (and I'm talking to you who know me and know me as not a person inclined to overestimate whatever comes from me, and for that reason, I certainly would not want this to appear in some way as a pompous, overstated kind of pronouncement). I would rather have said it in order to indicate my impression of what some of these graphic designers and illustrators working in their unpretentious ways have created.

Seen as an expression of this country's culture, it's pretty overwhelming. Having come from the old world of Europe where subtle differences within an overriding maintenance of high standards of quality was the beautiful thing, the youthful exuberance of creation and at the same time the enterprising variety in doing things, as I observed it in America, is very, very wonderful.

I talked at one time about our admiration in Europe for American children's book illustrations. At that time, America still, as far as graphic design is concerned, relied to a great extent on the European image, but that changed with that unfettered outburst of creative energies after World War II.

Nathan: You find that it is continuing? Is it interesting?

Lederer: It's still very much continuing; only that with that kind of initiative by American designers and with the easy dissemination of ideas in books and publications, there has been much cross fertilization throughout the world. In Japan,

some quite startling and beautiful things are now done, as is true in Europe.

Books and Illustration

[Interview 5: July 26, 1988]

Lederer: I have really looked forward to this session because we finally come back to where I had wanted to be all along.

Nathan: And that is--?

Lederer: That is to talk about my desire for doing work in connection with books. Even that is not quite right, because as I think back to when I started drawing in somewhat more than in just a babylike manner, I had first the idea, since I obviously had some talents and my parents made too much ado about it, that I would become the greatest painter and set the world aflame.

Then that changed, in connection with my interest in literature, to the idea of becoming an illustrator. That, again, was the great thing, and I modeled myself after the most wonderful German illustrator, the Impressionist painter, Slevogt, who is not very well known in this country, like all the German Impressionists. But he was one of a triumvirate there (Liebermann, Slevogt, Corinth). All three were excellent also as illustrators of books, but Slevogt had the most genuine gifts as an illustrator, particularly with pen and ink drawings and with etchings.

He was my idol, and the person whom, as a teenager, I endlessly imitated without having any background in it. So that was the field of illustration. Then when I started in Prague, in Vienna, later also in New York, the field changed for me, essentially, to using these skills on book jackets because there was not much doing in book illustration.

In early years, and in study years, I had illustrated Dickens and Flaubert and Dostoevksy, and whatever came my reading way. When I came to New York, still with that thought in the back of my mind, I did illustrations for *Showboat* by Edna Ferber, in order to have something of an American subject matter to show, and got involved with the Hawthorne stories which I loved, *The Scarlet Letter* and *House of Seven Gables*, for which I did full sets of illustrations. They have been shown in exhibition but not published.

The idea to become an illustrator was always connected in my mind with the idea that my illustrations should have a place in a book.

Nathan: Somewhere in this discussion, can you say more about what it is that an illustrator brings to a book through these pictures?

Lederer: Well, what he brings to the book is that when he reads it, and reads it sympathetically, he can with his illustrations go beyond what the writer has actually put down in words. The writer, in order not to overburden the story with whatever may be of a descriptive nature, will often leave things suggested. That's where the illustrator can take off. That's why the illustrator's task really intrigued me; its expansion of and immediate outgrowth of the literature.

This idea is what some great artists have done who have been inspired by a piece of literature to create a new imagery. In the most monumental way, you might say the Sistine Chapel is an example. In our contemporary scene, there are the wonderful, unbelievable illustration scenes that Bonnard, Picasso, Matisse, Dufy, and Dunoyer de Segonzac created for some of the great works of literature. These works I almost would not call illustrations, but independent works of art that happen to be inspired by a piece of literature in the same way as a landscape might have inspired Cézanne.

What I try to describe is the illustration that really belongs in a book and is in its appearance integrated and, I might even say, subordinated to the total appearance of the book. Certainly, by the intimacy of its relation to the literature, it should for the reader never be an intrusion but an expansion of reading enjoyment. That is a question that is often raised; people will say, "I like to read a book rather with my own imagination going." I could only answer that the illustration is not meant to be an interference with that, but it is simply setting another person's reaction, a visual reaction, next to your own. The give-and-take between literature and illustration could be compared to the relations between words of the poet and their musical setting in, as an example, the *Earlking* by Schubert. You can experience the drama in reading the poem, and you can absorb the power of the music that is fused with the words.

There is no argument if somebody says, "Illustrations in a book bother me, and I would rather read a book without them." That person should not have an illustrated book.

Meaningful illustrations, if they are fully integrated with the typography, actually offer an enriched experience. But as I sadly experienced, a negative attitude has become rather prevalent. In addition, economic factors are reasons why there are hardly any illustrated books around anymore.

Nathan: Except children's books?

Lederer: Well, children's books are a totally different story. It's good that you mentioned that. I told you how overwhelmed I had been at an early stage by what is being done here in America, elsewhere, too, but in America in particular, in wonderful children's book illustrations. It so happens that it has not come my way.

Nathan: The "Heffalump" drawings suggest that you do have this playful quality.

Lederer: Yes, playful is all right. Well, if I had found a publisher who would have wanted his children's story in the spirit of those drawings, I certainly could have done it. But as a matter of fact, I had a children's story written for me and did illustrations for it. The stories were nice, but we could not entice book publishers to do the book.

Yes, you are quite right. Sometimes it is simply a lack of opportunity that leads you not to develop parts of your abilities. The illustrations I did for my children and, more recently, for my grandchildren, certainly show that I could do it. But my original bent was for illustrating great literature, and that bent has remained to this day. Although a few years ago it happened--and that is also one of those things that occur in a person's life--Harold Berliner wanted me to do illustrations for *Bartleby the Scrivener*, to my mind one of the greatest stories ever written. I struggled with it for two months but then gave up. It's a very rare thing that has happened to me that I really said, "I can make that drawing, but it was never *Bartleby the Scrivener* as I sensed it." So I told Harold, "Let's forget that."

Outlets for Illustrations

Lederer: Well, since I am telling now the story of my illustrations and have been relating all kinds of things that did not happen, what happened was that I found first outlets to do illustrations in magazines for which I worked, in greeting

cards, in Christmas cards, special announcements and several cookbooks--but what I did in fully illustrated books for Harold Berliner is something I will want to talk about later on.

What emerged were actually two styles of illustrations which I used for different tasks. One was of a strongly decorative, slightly archaic kind, which I could employ in illustrative initials, or for illustrations with a strong connect with type or with lettering, as I have done in books like *When We Belonged to Spain*, or the broadsides that I did later on.

Nathan: Would you just say what a broadside is?

Lederer: A broadside is a sheet printed on one side and consists of a complete statement of some kind or a poem that people want to live with, the same way that they would want to live with a picture, something which they like to come back to very often. Some people call it a poster, but that is a misnomer. A poster is an announcement of some kind, whereas a broadside conveys a personal idea and has a sense of intimacy about it.

The other style was developed from what had been my inclination way back, a loose, sketchy, impressionistic style, carried out in pen and ink, that I gradually simplified for easier reproduction, most successfully, I think, in two books with stories by Dickens, or in a cookbook which was called *The Blue Danube Cookbook*, a collection of Max Knight's mother's recipes. That book lent itself ideally to my style and gave me a chance to use my recollections of Vienna.

Attitudes Toward Book Design

Lederer: Now, if that broadly covers one side of work that I got into later on, the other side was an outgrowth of preoccupation with the place in which the illustration should appear in books. Books as objects should have their own style and should by their attractiveness add to the response of the reader.

I had known of and met some of the famous people in past California book design history and of the present: the Grabhorns and the wonderful Adrian Wilson, and Jack Stauffacher, Andrew Hoyem, and others active in this field. There is, however, something that very definitely set me

somewhat apart from them: they all had started with a fascination with type and printing as a craft, something I never had. It was lovely and admirable, but I could not share this fascination, much as I cherished the appearance of letterforms and typefaces and knew how to use them and all one can do with them.

A man like Adrian Wilson came to this field simply by discovering type in a printing shop and finding out what could be done with it. He fell in love with the craft of setting type and printing and remained wrapped up with it for the rest of his life. All the marvelous work he has done had started for him with the smell of ink, the feel of a piece of type in his hand, and with the sense of excitement in getting the type impressed on a sheet of paper. I had spent some time in a printshop during a summer in my study years, in order to acquire knowledge of practical matters, but I did not get the romance of it.

Nathan: You were already in love with something else?

Lederer: Yes, all the time I was very definitely in love with illustration and with the total appearance of books. So when I came to book designing--

Working with Book Publishers

Nathan: How did that start?

Lederer: It started by getting assignments for book designs from the University of California Press. I had not shown them the book designs I had done in Europe way back, but the graphic work that I showed to them gave them the idea that I understand typography, have taste, and that I can do illustration. They wanted to try me out and gave me one book to design and one book jacket with illustration to do.

I did a lot of homework, steeped myself in whatever available literature I could get hold of in order to find out practical technical matters of what is strictly to be understood as book design as practiced in America. I had designed books in Europe. The specifications for the book design there consisted essentially of giving the format, the binding design, the basic page, the title page, and the choices of the typeface. All the rest was done in the

tradition indicated to a well-trained craftsperson in the print shop.

All the minutiae and particulars of specifications for all parts of a book that are required here were something that I had to try to learn now. My first design was successful. The Press liked what I did and gave me more and more books to design, and that continues to this day.

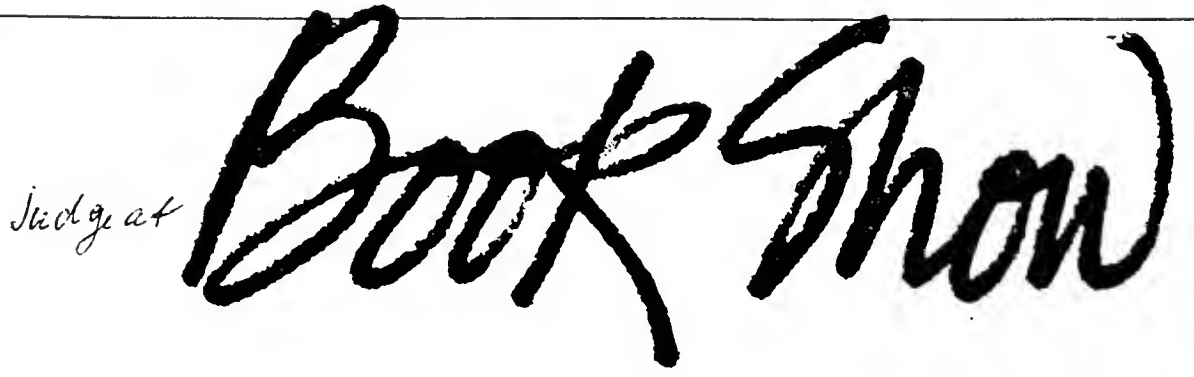
Now that I had these books to show, I went to other publishers, and the ball started rolling, and, gradually, with all kinds of opportunities from different publishers, I became a full-fledged book designer. By that time I was getting close to sixty, and I was really starting virtually a new kind of work, if I consider that although I had much experience in typography, I had very little in the production of books.

Nathan: I might ask with whom you worked when you started with the University of California Press. Was there one person you worked with in particular?

Lederer: Yes, Bill Snyder was in charge of the book design department, which at that time maintained a regular staff of four or five designers. The freelance people, like me, got only what the regular designers on the staff could not handle themselves, or if something special was wanted. Bill McClung, executive editor, was one who was at an early stage aware of what I could contribute at the Press and instrumental in having me design some books that I seemed particularly well suited to do. The setup at the University Press was later changed. There is now one designer, the art director, Steve Renick, working with free-lancers and a production department under a new production manager of superior qualifications, Chet Grycz.

Nathan: So you were saying, then, after the reorganization, that there were not people on staff in the same way.

Lederer: That's right, because now most of the work was done by outsiders, including the technical work and the mechanicals. New is also a gradual transformation to using more often standardized designs, and particularly also new opportunities for shortcuts and simplification of the new methods of type image production of the computer age, none of which have, however, altered what makes a well-designed book, and the need for a new design for most books.



WOLFGANG LEDERER

I remember a statement by Goethe that criticism should come from "affectionate partiality, joy, sympathy" rather than from pretense of expertise. With such a view in mind, I approached the task of evaluating the entries to the Bookbuilders West Book Show with some uneasiness. It would have been easy to judge the books on the basis of my spontaneous and passionate reactions. But I found the books extremely difficult to evaluate fairly when considering the great variety of problems with which designers and manufacturers were confronted. Some of these problems are evident, some can be guessed, but not all are known. In the end, and with some relief, I discovered how frequently my evaluations coincided with those of the other judges. That publishers, designers, and manufacturers want to expose themselves to such evaluations speaks for the seriousness of their concern for the quality of their work.

"While doing a great variety of work in the graphic arts, my favorite tasks have always been those that were connected with books and publications. For the past twelve years I have worked almost exclusively on the design and illustration of books." Wolfgang Lederer, Professor Emeritus at the California College of Arts & Crafts in Oakland, studied at the Academy for Graphic Design and Book Arts in Leipzig, Germany, the Académie Scandinave, Paris, and Officina Pragensis, Prague. He freelanced in Vienna and New York for five years, thereafter working in the Bay Area. From 1942-1956 Wolfgang was Art Director, Wine Publications; from 1957 to the present he has freelanced for such companies as University of California Press, Chronicle Books, Berliner & McGinnis, Sierra Club Books, Presidio Press, Lancaster Miller, and American Artists Group.

Wolfgang has been associated with the California College of Arts & Crafts since 1942. He was Chairman, Department of Graphic Design, from 1944-1955, and from 1956-1977 was Director, Division of Design. In 1981 Wolfgang was named Professor Emeritus. He has won numerous distinguished awards, including those from the American Institute of Graphic Arts, Bookbuilders West, and Rounce and Coffin Club.

The ingredients that make a good book, one in which all parts harmonize and support reading, perusal, or use as study sources, are well-known. They can be found in those books that were selected for awards—a satisfying large number, incidentally. It is impossible to present a detailed critical analysis, but several comments regarding problems I encountered with some frequency are appropriate. The use of too many typefaces within one book, particularly when their choice did not enliven a page or clarify a presentation, bothered me, as did the occasional selection of a typeface whose character was obviously not in harmony with the character of the design for the whole book.

I was often disturbed by attempts to enliven quiet-looking books by overly heavy chapter heads or by too elaborate, colorful, or eccentric part titles (sometimes also covers) that made the text pages look dull by contrast. There was also a frequent tendency to overdesign, to make the appearance of various levels of heads and subheads very noticeable. Lastly, I observed at times that the change of color in the reproduction of typefaces gave each face a different weight from one page (or signature) to another.

It is not necessary here to point out that many (if not most) of my comments refer to details that hardly influence the success of a book in the marketplace. But those who contribute to the creation of beautiful books—and all books *should be* beautiful—know that their work requires efforts and attention to many details that go essentially unnoticed; certainly by the general public. All the more must an idealistic attitude persevere. Concern for the bottom line cannot become an excuse for mediocrity in the creation of books. There are enough examples of well-produced and successful books to bear out that such an attitude does not reflect a disregard for practical matters. It takes the courage and the fortitude of all concerned to ensure that books will be designed and made with regard for high quality, not because they sell better that way, but because beautiful books make for a better quality of life.

Nathan: I might ask you one other thing. You were saying that in Europe you could rely on very highly trained technical craftspeople. In this country, is it somewhat different?

Lederer: It is. I think this is something that I mentioned earlier: the training of a craftsperson in Europe in the field, let's say, of typesetting, very definitely included a very rigorous training in design. Once, when I was in Zurich, in a crafts school, I saw samples of assignments as part of training for typesetters. They included the setting of a title page in six different ways. Now a typesetter here certainly could do that technically, but he is not expected to have ideas of how to create such images. He is trained to do typesetting technically as well as possible but always following very detailed specifications given by the designer.

Altogether, my contact with the University Press has brought me in contact with many wonderful people, all deeply devoted to the work, whether they are editors or production people. The concern for the printed word must be a bond that makes these people--interesting and different from each other as they are as individuals--appear as a quite special group.

Another publisher I worked for was Chronicle Books, where the tasks were highly varied: photographic books, cookbooks, books dealing with California history--an interesting variety of subject matter. Another was Presidio Press, a publishing house entirely devoted to military literature--a subject that is quite foreign to my nature. But my personal relation with the publisher, a retired army major with an enthusiasm for fine books, remained excellent to the end, when he left the company.

There is Sierra Club Books, who call me if they have a text that seems to fall within the area considered my province, that is, a "University Press type book," as it is now often called. I do not know whether that is really valid, but, in any case, in categorizing different designers, it helps the publishers to put persons into different cubbyholes for various assignments.

I actually feel comfortable designing all kinds of books as long as their appearance is to appeal to readers for whom books are an important part of their lives, something that they cannot live without and whose appearance they therefore treasure. The difference between a well-designed book and an indifferently presented or badly done book is often minute, and the number of people who are consciously aware of what makes the difference is very small. It is often a surprise to

me to find that even very educated people are not even aware that books are designed.

I consider the book designer's task in most cases a quite humble one: to create an inviting setting for the text, one that possibly in a subtle way sets its appearance apart from other books that a prospective buyer may thumb through in a bookstore or keep in his library at home. The basic structure of a book, as we know it today, was established five hundred years ago as a practical way to keep printed texts together and allow convenient reading. These traditions of the book as a physical object and the established forms of letters--in the Western world 2,000 years old--set definite limitations within which a designer works and which he can transgress only at the risk of interfering with the enjoyment of absorbing what a good book presents: a worthwhile text to be read without distraction and with pleasure.

Choice of Typeface

Lederer: I do not consider the choice of a typeface per se as of such tremendous importance. There are some typefaces that are inappropriate for some books, either too heavy or too stylish in one way or another, but a historical appropriateness for a text can only very rarely be a criterion for the choice of a typeface.

As a young man, I got acquainted with world literature, regardless of whether it was Dickens or Dostoevsky or Flaubert, mostly in very beautiful German editions by the famous Insel publishers who presented the classics in standard volumes. Binding, format, and typeface in these books were all the same. As a matter of fact, they were all set in Fraktur, which certainly is a typeface of very pronounced historical appearance that has no relation to these texts.

As a designer, I approach book design as a reader. Now I contradicted myself, I said, "as a designer." Let's call it--I approach book design as a reading designer. I still consider the reading as paramount. Anything that interferes with the reading is obnoxious to me. Obvious design can become irritating, not excluding the possibility that there are occasions where books can gain a separate place for themselves as objects of art that happen to have the shape or appearance of books.

I present literature. I expect the reader to approach literature and not the design. I think about our task as book designers, as designing something that should be sensed but not seen. Maybe that sums up my basic attitude, including also that I feel very much in sympathy with the great architectural genius, Mies van der Rohe, who at one time said, "I don't want to be interesting, I want to be good."

I feel that expressed one hundred percent what I am yearning for. Underlying the designing of books there is the desire to create order. I know the other side of the medal, as far as design is concerned, which is boredom, making things appear in a very orderly but terribly boring way. If I am in a very self-questioning frame of mind, I look at some of my lesser achievements, saying, "Well, some are merely decently done, but uninteresting to look at." In case of doubt, on my own drawing desk, I rather decide for the less startling solution to the design of a book page rather than for a wild one that could disturb a reader. However, I have respect for people who have the daring to do something outrageous, who get away with it, and in the process may create something very stimulating. Maybe that sums up where I stand in the world of book design.

Working with Authors

Lederer: The other aspect that interests me tremendously about book design is the chance of working with people. In all fields in which I worked, I felt that was a stimulating asset; and when I work on books, I find myself more often in contact with people with whom, by the nature of my particular background and leanings, I feel also an emotional relationship. These are people who cherish beautiful things. I think of the design of a book as a cooperative effort together with the editors and production people.

The author, regardless of whether I meet him/her or not, is of course the person who has created the thing for which I am to shape the garment. Although I do not often meet the authors in person, I meet them through their writing. In reading the manuscript, usually only selected parts of it, an image emerges in my mind that gives a direction to what I am going to do. I find that very necessary and desirable, and definitely preferable to working from a brief synopsis.

Nathan: Would you care to say anything about the book *Literary Architecture*?

Lederer: I have three examples I would very much like to use to elucidate my thinking about book design.

Some Practical Factors

Nathan: Good, but before we go on to that, could I revert back to one question in design? I could only say, "Amen," when you spoke of the clarity and simplicity of the page as being of service to the reader. Would you have anything to say about the use of white space in readability?

Lederer: That's part of it. The amount of white space is partly, of course, a matter of economics because if you use a lot of white space, you get less on the page and have to print more pages. It can also be a question of driving up the bulk of the book too high. I notice that when I look at other books by the same publisher, mine are often distinguishable by being rather bulky because I like generous margins. If I get away with it, if my proposals are not rejected, it can bring up the bulk of a book considerably. On the other hand, a heavy appearance can also make a book appear less desirable to a prospective reader.

These practical factors are part of the game. You have to work within practical possibilities towards the most desirable result. Sometimes the aim is an inexpensive production; or a long manuscript should appear as not too heavy a volume; or a short one should make a book that does not look skimpy. In addition to amount of margin space, leading-space between lines, size of typeface, can have an influence on such decisions, as does ultimately the choice of a high-or-low bulk paper stock.

Choice of typeface and selection of format and margins are made at the start. Other factors are determined by the nature of divisions. How are the titles: short, long, varying? How are the subtitles? How many subdivisions in subtitles or levels of subtitles are there? All of this influences the patterns and choices that you can make in the use of space, sizes of type, and kinds of contrasts, until from many decisions made, together with the idea I have of that book, a definite image for the appearance of a text page emerges. I read in Adrian Wilson's lovely book, *The Design of*

Hermann Zapf · D-6100 Darms[illegible]sweg 35 · Telefon: (06151) 76825

September 24, 1991

Dear Harold:

We spent a nice time together in Parma. Nevertheless our stay was much too short. I would have liked so much to hear more about your typefoundry. After my return the first thing I did was to study your book A Christmas Carol. This is an edition of special beauty, - above all due to the illustrations by Wolfgang Lederer. Thank you so much for it - also on behalf of Gudrun.

In Parma I forgot to ask you if you are in possession of my Manuale Typographicum 1968. Your brief note would be very much appreciated.

All my best wishes and many thanks for your invitation to Nevada City which I hopefully will be able to accept one day.

Kind regards - also from Gudrun,

yours sincerely,

H Zapf

Mr. Harold Berliner
224 Main Street
Nevada City/Ca. 95959
SA

Books, that he starts out his book design with the title page to set the tone for the rest of the book.

I do the title page at the end as my reward after I have designed the whole book. I try first to resolve all the practical questions and not get hung up on some idea that then, considering what the practical demands are, creates problems that are in my way. Then, at the end, there comes the real goody, the title page. That, for the designer, is really the place where he or she can show on one page in more space and with a limited amount of copy, more imagination and control than anywhere else inside a book.

Incidentally, title pages in this country are handled with more weight and emphasis than they generally are in Europe. I occasionally had the repercussion that a title page had not enough "presence" when first working in book design in this country. A title page in Europe has what you would call presence only in a very restrained way.

Hermann Zapf and the Development of Type Faces

Lederer: I think I should at this point mention a person that had the greatest influence on me after Steiner-Prag. The great idol for me in the last thirty years in this area of work connected with typography, lettering, and book design is Hermann Zapf, whom I consider a genius of a wonderful kind. He embodies everything that I am yearning for. His imagination and inventiveness are boundless; his taste and relationship to the printed page is admirable, and so are his understanding of letter forms, his calligraphy, his sense of space and color. You can only be in awe of all that.

I don't want to sound like an adolescent, but I know that I am somewhat inclined to that in the presence of somebody who has accomplished as much as Hermann Zapf, and has contributed so much and still does. His is at the moment a very important voice in the total changeover in typesetting technology and type design production. Going wholeheartedly along with the idea that the world changes, he is aware that a new technology brings in new things, and new things are not necessarily bad. With his great sense of tradition, he maintains that the mistake in what type designers could do for the new technology would be to imitate the old typefaces rather than to create new typefaces in terms of a technology.

Nathan: You are thinking now of computerized and photo-typesetting?

Lederer: Computerized typesetting; photo-typesetting was new thirty to forty years ago. New typefaces are being designed for it continuously. Some of them imitate certain characteristics that were in the nature of type that was to be cast and cut in metal, which cannot be done in the digital systems. Zapf's understanding and guidance are so important there and so influential in the new world of typography today, in which he has become a wise and open-minded counseling voice.

Nathan: You're seeing a continuum of development?

Lederer: Yes, a continuum of development. However, in the last decades we have seen the appearance of some typefaces that I can only call atrocious. I do not think that somebody who represents in a painting all human beings as bowlegged creates a meaningful new form of art, because you would see these figures only as bowlegged human beings. In the same way I dislike bowlegged letters. I know all this sounds somewhat--what is the pejorative term?

Nathan: Conservative?

Lederer: Well, overly conservative and overly teacherly, pedantic, as if coming from somebody who wants to write on systems. I do maintain that anything of the most fantastic sort and imaginativeness can be done with letters, if it is meant to be just something of a fantastic imaginative sort. I have seen letters used in wonderful ways that were explosive and fantastic in their deviation from the established norm. But when I read a book, I do not want to struggle against things of that kind. The same goes also for the use of too small typefaces that seem to ask for a magnifying glass with which to read.

Literary Architecture and Its Awards

Lederer: A while ago, I was given by the University Press a very unusual manuscript by a young writer, Ellen Frank, who had written it as her Ph.D. thesis at the University of California. The editors thought it was an extraordinary manuscript, in which the author is trying to explore interrelations between literature and architecture and discussing the work of some writers who had used architectural

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Literary Architecture

Ellen Eve Frank

328 pages; 5 x 8
Designed by Wolfgang Lederer

Composed in Fototronic Garamond by Dharma Press. Printed offset by Carey Colorgraphics on 70 lb. Warren Lustro Offset Enamel Dull. Bound by Roswell Book Binders in Holliston Crown Linen. Jacket printed offset in one color.

COMMENT: This little book feels good in the hand, looks good to the eye, and refreshes the spirit. It is a book meant for reading, contemplating, and inspiration and has been a delight to those readers who have cared to comment on its design and manufacture—and there have been many such. We find it a book we are proud of.

Literary
Architecture

Essays Toward a Tradition

WALTER PATER
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS
MARCEL PROUST
HENRY JAMES

Ellen Eve Frank

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY • LOS ANGELES • LONDON

RETROSPECTIVE

descriptions as part of their writings. It is a text of a highly personal nature.

I met the author, a very sensitive, attractive woman, who was terribly anxious how her book would look and concerned about every detail of it. Her watchful, concerned attitude, together with editor McClung's special interest in it, set the scene. Ellen Frank had for her book gotten in Europe--she had done research at the Courtauld Institute in London--copies of some of the most wonderful photographs of architecture in the nineteenth century. They were mainly churches in England and France, just beautiful prints.

So there was the question of what to do with this book, and I felt that here was a text of great personal intimacy which should be presented in a very inviting way. That meant a small format, easy to hold in one's hand. The author felt considerable concern about the small format: "How about my wonderful photographs?" One could just as well have used them to make a gorgeous, big picture book, a coffee table book if you want, and let the text be the customary accompaniment as a pretext for showing the pictures. I couldn't see it that way. I wanted these photographs to be an accompaniment. That led to a good deal of soul-searching on the author's part, and since I was very sympathetic with her attitude, not simply saying, "Well, I know that this is the way it should be done," we had a good many conversations about this basic question. I was able to convince her that a small book would be the best way to go.

In addition to that, I had the support--and now comes what I like so much as cooperative work--of various people participating. The new production manager, Chet Grycz, at the University of California Press, was able to solicit from various printers examples of how to get the best reproductions of these photographs by printing them as duotone (printing with two inks) in the size in which they might be used. Seeing these proofs, that finally made the idea of a small format really convincing. So I designed the book and I designed it as a very conspicuously inconspicuous book: a very, very restrained title page without dramatic presence and everything most carefully spaced; all captions broken up the way I wanted them to be broken up for best reading; epigraphs the same way; centered lines throughout, but really deliberately very unobviously designed.

Fortunately, the design was accepted on that basis. The typeface is Garamond. The reproductions are most carefully carried out. I had made the reproductions, even on these comparatively small pages, very small with a lot of margin around them.

So this really was a process to create an elegant, simple book, not one that would draw attention to itself. The really wonderful thing that happened was that this is the book that has earned more design awards than anything that I have ever done, beginning with a recognition from The Rounce and Coffin Club in Los Angeles. The American Institute of Graphic Arts in New York selected it as one of the fifty best designed books of the year. Bookbuilders West created a special award category "Best of Show" for this book in their annual show, something they had never done before and have not done since. It got recognition for design in reviews and accolades everywhere.

The author was enchanted. It was a great success and a wonderful way of affirmation that something that is created in such an inconspicuous way can actually get that much recognition. The book then was also produced in paperback, repeating the design. Well, I have since found that two books were designed consciously based on that book and both look essentially like it. In both cases, the two different designers told me about it, they thought it was so good that they just copied it. "Imitation is the greatest flattery." [laughter]

There is one more story about that book *Literary Architecture*, which is really such an oddity. A new publishing house in California, Northpoint Press, set out a number of years back to produce books that would be really well made, using acid-free paper and quality typesetting. They are guided by an excellent designer, David Bullen. They pursued the goal to produce books whose standards in quality and manufacture would reflect their respect for literature, for authors, and for the reading public. I learned from someone who was present that the publisher at the beginning of their publishing venture, which is by now very successful, showed the group of people who were to work with him that little volume of *Literary Architecture*, and said, "That's the way I want our books to look."

Nathan: Wonderful.

Imprints, Newsletter of
Associates of the UC Press
Fall 1987

Wolfgang Lederer
Book Designer of numerous UC Press titles, including *Giovanni and Lusanna* by Gene Brucker (UC Press, 1985), winner of the 1986 Bookbuilders West Trade Design Award
Berkeley

I like at this time of my life to read primarily biographies of creative people. Currently I am moved and stirred by the beautifully written life of Chekov by Henri Troyat.

Among my UC Press books there are a few that relate to special experiences I had in designing them. One of my favorites is *Literary Architecture* by Ellen Frank, which I associate with an unusually stimulating working relationship with the author, who is also a painter. As an outcome of this exchange we have become close friends.

There never is enough time to read even a part of all I would like to read, but I will gladly forego entertainments offered in movies or on television to save time for books in the evening. Only friends and music take precedence.

Awards (Partial List)

Year	Award	Author/Title	Public.	Organization
1971	Award of Merit	Anybody's Gold	Chronicle Books	B.B.W.
1979	Award of Merit	Calderwood Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad	U.C.P.	B.B.W.
1980	Award of Excellence	Snow/Vermeer	U.C.P.	B.B.W.
1980	Best of Show	Frank/Literary Architecture *	U.C.P.	B.B.W.
	Award of Excellence	" " "	"	A.I.G.A.
	Award	" " "	"	Rounce & Coffin Club
1984	Award (Judge's Choice)	Boccaccio/Decameron	U.C.P.	A.A.U.P. B.B.W.
1985	Award	Representations (journal)	U.C.P.	A.A.U.P.
1987	Award	Monteverdi	U.C.P.	B.B.W.

Abbreviation: Publisher: U.C.P. University of California Press

Award giving organizations: A.I.G.A. American Institute of Graphic Arts
A.A.U.P. American Association of University Presses
B.B.W. Bookbuilders West

* This title was also selected in 1986 when the A.A.U.P. invited all University Presses in the U.S. to submit to their anniversary show the one book that each Press considers its best design of the past fifty years/

Lederer: Oh, incidentally, I have to add to all the accolades that at the fiftieth anniversary show of the Association of American University Presses, each university press in the country was asked to select the one book that they considered representative of the highest standards of design and production they had achieved in the past fifty years. The University of California Press selected *Literary Architecture* for this honor.

At a recent talk to the Association of Western University Presses, I told the audience something about my attitude towards book design, that I don't want to draw attention to my design, but I surely couldn't help adding that if my professional colleagues notice, it is very, very nice. [laughter]

This book has also led to a continuing friendship with the author, who now lives as a painter in the East.

Collection: *Cry California* Articles

Lederer: By contrast, I could mention now a book of a totally different nature, a book Alfred Heller, the publisher of *Cry California*, the environmental and ecology-minded journal, had asked me to design. It was to be a collection of the best articles that had appeared in *Cry California*.

Nathan: Are we talking about the collection now?

Lederer: That's right. That book consisted of articles by many authors, illustrated in the greatest variety of ways with drawings, cartoons, charts, photographs--you name it--as they had appeared in the issues of the journal over so many years.

Nathan: What was the name of the book itself?

Lederer: *The New California Tomorrow Book*. In this case, the task obviously was to create order out of a jumble. That gave the direction. Now this is not *Literary Architecture* in appearance, but it is a book that I think invites reading and certainly does not present a jumble. Careful selection of spacing and order by a hierarchy of emphasis and other means of design were employed to accomplish this. The book was successful in resolving an inherent problem, which was to create a sense of continuity, a flow with material that was quite unsuitable to achieve that end.

Giovanni and Lusanna

Lederer: There is another book I like to mention, just to give an example of a book designed with a suggestion of historical style. It is a book featuring a Renaissance text from Florentine archives, telling the story of a broken love affair that led to a trial about broken promises. The story reflects very interestingly on the mores of those times, since it is based on the court papers recorded in that little book.

James Clark, the director of the University Press, and sponsoring editor of that book, wanted it to be designed as an inviting, pleasant-looking book. There were some contemporary woodcut illustrations, chosen by the author, and I went to quite some trouble trying to find some additional ones, which I felt would be desirable to add some atmosphere. I found them in various libraries after a good deal of searching. I employed ornamental details and lettering for the title, which I did in a manuscript style of the period.

This book was accepted for the show of the American University Presses of 1987, for which the selections were made by Hermann Zapf. That meant a good deal to me. His commentary in the catalog was, "It looks like a book done with love, appropriate for a book about love."

Nathan: This is *Giovanni and Lusanna*?

Lederer: Right. And that comment by Zapf certainly warmed my heart.

University Press Style

Lederer: In their appearance, books for the University Press have sometimes been called books in a university press style. University press book productions do have by nature something that sets them apart. They originally started merely as a vehicle for professors to publish books within their departments, and had no trade book outlook. But this has changed considerably. The university presses are very much in the market today and yet, by the nature of the titles of their books and by how thoroughly they are researched and annotated, they maintain a distinct character that emanates from the university as an institution devoted to learning and research. That sets them apart from other trade books.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence

Gene Brucker

150 pages: 5 x 8¼; 2,000 copies
Designed by Wolfgang Lederer
Production coordination by Fran Mitchell
Edited by Marilyn Schwartz

Unit manufacturing cost $4.38, retail price $12.95. Text composed in 11/13 Bembo, Linotron 202, with Bembo display by Wilsted and Taylor. Printed offset on 50 lb. Antique Cream by Vail-Ballou Press. Bound in Rex Linen 21405 with Ecological Fibers Rainbow endsheets by Vail-Ballou Press. Jacket printed four-color offset on 80 lb. enamel by New England Book Components.

DESIGNER'S COMMENTS: The designer was guided by the style of the author who is not only a writer, but an artist who possesses a highly personal style. The text and the subject suggested an intimate format resulting in the small trim with classical typographic and image layout. The concept was to produce an honest and unassuming book with beautiful illustrations positioned on single pages with generous spacing surrounding them.

ZAPF'S COMMENTS: An atmosphere of the Renaissance is presented by the design elements of this book, with pleasing arrangement of ornaments and woodcasts. The whole design is done with knowledge of handling type, especially the title page that uses calligraphic lettering. The binding and gold stamping are well done. It looks as though the book was done with love, as is appropriate to the love described inside.

This is a great help to me in a situation where today's book publishing industry veers considerably towards the big market place, selling in chain stores, a blockbuster kind of marketing that has moved book publishing out of its former, more sheltered position. I find these attitudes very foreign to my way of thinking and cannot design books that are produced with that attitude. For that reason, I am grateful that the university presses, in spite of a greater interest in the marketplace, have upheld their standards of quality and restraint in book production.

I think you asked at one time whether I also do logotypes for publishers. Of course, I have done a great many for publishers and organizations. A series of books, like those for the Biblioteca Italiana for the University of California Press, is held together largely by a characteristic logo that conspicuously appears in the same place on all volumes.

Incidentally, some of the fun of designing logos or trademarks can be to see them reappear on all kinds of mundane objects like drinking cups, T-shirts, balloons, et cetera, and be carried out in different ways. The one for the 100-year anniversary of Saint Mary's College, which I discovered when driving through Golden Gate Park, was carried out as a floral design with hundreds of plants on a large flowerbed in front of the conservatory. Another one I designed is used as a watermark in a special paper made for the publisher Harold Berliner.

Nathan: Oh, the HB?

Lederer: It's HB, yes. It's a little like a western branding mark.

Nathan: Just for fun, I tried to write it. It's very subtle. I couldn't do it.

Lederer: That's because it is not calligraphy. It is designed by building up the letters.

Harold Berliner, Letterpress and Fine Editions

Lederer: As a matter of fact, I did a few marks for Harold Berliner because he published under various names, including a greeting card line called Black Oak Press.

After describing the trade book and journal publishers, and the university presses, mention of Harold Berliner brings me to the third kind of publisher I work for. That is the special fine edition publisher, Harold Berliner, whom I mentioned before, with his printshop in Nevada City.

When Harold Berliner went into the production of books, he offered me an outlet for the design and illustration of books that would be exquisitely done, carefully set by hand or by very fine monotype, and printed by letterpress on the best paper available. These books were produced under the very best conditions, with sufficient time for alterations until everything would be absolutely right. They came out in numbered small editions, primarily with the idea to show what level of quality can be achieved in making beautiful books. They are meant for collectors of fine books and printing, as are also the large broadsides I did for him with quotes and poetry by Shelley, Wallace Stegner, Dickens, Goethe, and others.

When we produced *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens, we assumed that almost anybody had read that book before but would like the idea of an edition distinguished by its presentation and illustrations. It is being debated quite often in *Fine Print*, a journal that deals with such matters, whether the publishers of such book productions should not select texts that are a bit more special. With that in mind, Berliner then chose such texts as, for instance, the book *When We Belonged to Spain*, a record of tales a woman told of her childhood experiences in early California.

Nathan: Do you participate in choosing the manuscripts?

Lederer: Yes, sometimes. In a particular instance I got the editor-author together with Harold Berliner.

Most recently, I was able to get to Harold Berliner a very unusual text. A book was published by the University of Chicago Press some years ago on traveling French balladeers of the Renaissance. Maybe fifty of these songs appeared in the book in a translation by Max Knight, a great translator. I had come to know him as an editor at the University of California Press. Harold Berliner was enthusiastic to produce a special edition of the songs only with my illustrations in color, under the title *Knights and Valentines*. This is an ambitious and expensive undertaking. The edition is limited to 425 copies, of which 25 will be handbound in leather.

Another very interesting book that I designed for Harold Berliner is a collection of poems by a late nineteenth century French poet, Tristan Corbière, poems that are in kind related to Baudelaire's symbolism. I have designed the book and did a frontispiece illustration, using for heads a quite unorthodox old typeface and an unusual greenish paperstock. Berliner proposed to me to do illustrations for these poems, too, but I felt that would be totally inappropriate. At one time, you asked me that good question about the role of illustration in a book. In this case, I felt the illustrations would be an infringement on the very evocative, very visual imagery of the poetry, and for that reason told him that these poems should not be illustrated.

Harold and I have over the years maintained a very harmonious work relationship. He obviously also found that doing a good deal of work with me did not mean a monotony in appearance. He must have felt that although I have been involved with so many of his productions, there is enough variety.

Finding the Appropriate Style

Lederer: In one of your letters, you raised the questions of whether I am aiming at a Lederer style or at a publisher's style. No, I never did. I tried always to find the style that is appropriate for a specific book. That means different approaches. However, if you put all the books together that I have done, and all the illustrations, I think there is something that ties them all together. In other words, they are all done by me, and even if sometimes when I have a yearning to do something quite new, something really wild for my temperament and I look at it after a while, I have to say, "It still looks like what I do, and I cannot get out of my skin." [laughter]

So that is really the answer. Now some publishers in Germany had all their work done by one designer. Steiner-Prag did most of the books of Propylaen, Walter Tiemann for Insel, and thereby certain features came through that imparted the style of that designer on these publishing houses. On the other hand, here even Knopf--who was such a highly discriminating publisher and so very much interested in what the designer contributed and the choice of the typeface and with elaborate colophons at the end of his books where he described the nature and history of the typeface employed--

even he did not have the wish that by that he wanted his books recognized as having a Knopf style.

Concern for Quality

Lederer: With my work on books, I am now very much where I want to be and where at one time I had set my goal to be. In spite of my meandering through a great variety of work that I have done, from small trade advertisements to fully illustrated books, an underlying principle has stayed with me, really an outgrowth of my upbringing, my education generally and my education in the arts. It is a concern for quality.

When a very famous designer recently saw my illustrations for the toystore, Heffalump, he commented, "They are wonderful; they look so terribly uncommercial." [laughter] Today I worked on a small newspaper advertisement for this store. The type had been set; I used Zapf's Palatino, very elegant, and there was the signature, the store's name. In the process of the mechanical setting, some letters seemed a fraction too close together. Two letters seemed a bit too far apart. Mind you, when this little advertisement appears in an edition of a newspaper supplement, seen by some 700,000 people, not one of them would notice that difference of spacing, but I would. I spent a good half hour, carefully cutting these small letters apart, shifting them a fraction here, a fraction there, trying to keep them in line on these little pieces of paper until they were better spaced. It mattered, and that is what the whole thing is all about.

This is really what one lives for. I certainly cannot charge the client for that extra time. I certainly could not prove to the client that it makes a bean of difference to anybody, and it certainly will not sell one toy more or less, but it matters. This attitude has remained with me. In the long run, while if one describes it, it might almost sound slightly foolish, it still, like all things that one believes in, is something that gives life meaning.

If I were to sum up what I tried to convey in my many years of teaching, it is this idea that quality matters. I know that this must have sounded to some students either exaggerated or foolish or not really meaningful. To those who understood, this conviction must have conveyed something that is meaningful. It certainly has meant that if one spent that kind of attention also on a page in a trade publication that

SONNET
ON CHILLON

BY LORD BYRON

ETERNAL SPIRIT of the chainless mind!
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,
For there thy habitation is the heart—
The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy sons to fetters are consigned—
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.

Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar—for 'twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard!—May none those marks efface!
For they appeal from tyranny to God.

A Heron House production: printed at the Feathered Serpent Press.
Typeset by the Anchor & Acorn Press. Designed by Wolfgang Lederer.

was to go to farm equipment people who would not know one typeface from another typeface, it still was the thing that matters. It's not something that one can prove, but the thing that one simply does.

Nathan: That's admirable.

Lederer: Maybe this is also a nice way of summing up: Three years ago, the prestigious Book Club of California asked me to put on a show. While their quarters are very limited in space, I still made it a small retrospective of fifty years of work, which was, of course, book and periodical design, and I selected from these fifty years just a few examples. I felt very self-conscious at having my work seen in surroundings where the great masters in that field had shown their work, but the warm reaction, especially welcome from many colleagues, was very, very satisfying.

So, if life permits, I intend to go on in that vein for a while longer, as long as they let me.

Nathan: Yes indeed.

Thank you so much for this fine account of your life and work. We hope for much more to come.

Transcriber: Chris Fenner
Final Typist: Noreen Yamada

APPENDICES--Wolfgang Lederer

Appendix A

Wolfgang Lederer--Biographical Data Sheet

Born in Mannheim (Germany) January 16, 1912. Moved to Saarbrücken (Germany) 1922

Education: Graduation (Arbiturium) from Gymnasium in 1931

Art Education:

1931-1933 Akademie for Graphic Arts and Book Design/Leipzig
1933-1934 Paris, Académie Scandinave
1934-1936 Officina Pragensis under Hugo Steiner-Prag, Prague Czechoslovakia
Assistant to director, many student awards

Professional activities:

1936-1938 Vienna, Austria, freelance designer, mostly for book publishers (Bastei, Fischer, etc.)
one-man show, Heck Gallery
1938-1939 Prague, teacher at Officina Pragensis and freelance designer
1939-1941 New York, freelance designer, mostly for book publishers (Macmillan, Columbia University Press, Simon and Schuster, etc.)
1941-1980 Instructor, California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California. Later professor
1946-1975 Director of Design Division and Chairman, Design Department
1980 Professor emeritus
1941 to present: freelance design, mostly in the wine industry
1943-1957 art director, Wine Publications
1957-1965 art director, Farm Publications
1955 to present: work for publishers as book and publication designer and illustrator (Harold Berliner, University of California Press, Sierra Club Books, Chronicle Books, Northpoint Press, and others)

Numerous awards. Work represented in many annuals. Participant in many shows. One-man shows: Elder Gallery 1941, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art 1944, Book Club of California 1984.

Appendix B

Wolfgang Lederer--Items Deposited in The Bancroft Library

Folder titled "Logos" 4 items

Booklet The Two Islands by Irving H. Marcus, Illustrated by Wolfgang Lederer, dated 1947

Folder, treatment of Academy of Master Wine Growers design, 17 items

Folder, Christmas Card Development, 1989. Card for Harold Berliner, work on 7 sheets. Final version mounted on cardboard for reducing to 64%

Card "Merry Christmas" scene in park (two versions)

Folder titled "Corbière poems"
18 pages of correspondence: Wolfgang Lederer with Harold Berliner and members of his staff primarily concerning decisions on book design and production.
1 page on placement and dimensions of type
2 proof pages

Christmas card in color for American Artists Group
original
print

Folder titled "The Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, Designs for a logo" 1986
cover letter
10 sheets

Folder, The Private Press of Harold Berliner, Books and Broadsides: 1988
catalog designed by Wolfgang Lederer
publications designed by Lederer are checked in pencil

Newsprint page, "Visitez Prague" ad designed by Lederer, 1935

Folder titled "Production"
printed card, "Christmas Greetings"
inside, color separations and illustration

Folder titled "Logotypes"
3 pages showing logotypes for Negev Biblical Excavations, the Jewish Welfare Federation, Chronicle Books, Wine Publications, Asia House Publications, Institute of East Asian Studies, and Gateway Pacific Construction Company

Folder titled "Christmas Cards" with items dated and identified by client
American Artists Group, 1940
Personal, 1943
American Artists Group (award-winning wartime design), 1943
Personal, 1945
American Artists Group, 1946
Personal, 1947
Berliner & McGinnis, 1948
American Artists Group, 1949
American Artists, 1950
Harold Berliner, 1952
Bechtle Verlag, Germany, 1952
Harold Berliner, 1954
Joy Designs, San Francisco, 1956
Designers & Illustrators, 1957
American Artists Group, 1958
Designers & Illustrators, 1959
American Artists Group, 1960
Designers & Illustrators, 1961
Designers & Illustrators, 1963 (star)
Designers & Illustrators, 1963 (billboard)
Berliner & McGinnis, 1964
Mariedi Anders/Concert Management, 1966; 1968 Christmas Card (2 parts)
Harold Berliner, 1969
Mariedi Anders Concert Management, 1976
Christmas Greeting Broadside/Anders Concert Agency, 1978
Harold Berliner, 1979
Harold Berliner, 1982
Harold Berliner, 1983
Harold Berliner, 1985
Harold Berliner, 1986

Examples of books, journals, and other publications
Cry California Fall 1969; cover by Wolfgang Lederer
Nineteenth Century Literature quarterly, December 1987; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer 1979
Literary Architecture book by Ellen Eve Frank 1979; designed by Wolfgang Lederer
Representations quarterly, Summer 1987; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer 1982
The Journal of Musicology quarterly, Spring 1989; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer, 1985

Columbia Foundation: a Five-Year Report; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer, 1988
Computing Systems (Usenix) quarterly, Spring 1988; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer, 1988
Film Quarterly Fall 1989; cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer 1989
Arts and Crafts Review quarterly; cover illustration, initial letter by Wolfgang Lederer; lead article about Lederer, September 1952

Folder titled "Illustrations and Layouts: Books and Journals"
Interior folder, Illustrations for Wine Publications, San Francisco, 6 sheets
Edna Ferber/Show Boat/Print Magazine, 1939
extract from ...Bardell against Pickwick, 8 pages, Lederer design and illustrations, 1983
extract from A Christmas Carol, various pages of type and illustration, design and illustrations by Wolfgang Lederer, 1976. Includes one large, animated Christmas street scene with personal clues: "HB" over entrance-way, and the letters "...liner & Co." refer to the publisher, Harold Berliner; a shop sign reads "Tom's Toys"; another "Andy Grocer"; an ornamental "H" appears above an archway, referring to sons Thomas and Andrew, and Wolfgang's wife Hanni, respectively.

Folder titled, "Covers, Books & Journals, Book Jackets"
journal covers: 1946, 1983, 1987, 1989
book jackets:
volume by Dr. Th. Wolff, 1936
Julácké dny, 1937
Kein Krieg in Troja, 1937
Frühling in Dalmatien, 1937
Menschen der Südsee, 1938
Schwarzes Unheil, 1938
Half That Glory, 1939
A Spanish Tudor, 1941
Theodor Boveri, 1967
Leonardo's Legacy, 1968
Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty, 1969
The California Tomorrow Plan Revised Edition, 1972
Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad, 1974
Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose, 1977
An Islamic Response to Imperialism, 1980
Mallarmé Igitur, 1982
Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin, 1985
Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance, 1987
Performance Dynamics and the Amsterdam Werkteater, 1988
Orlando Innamorato, 1988

World Fair's quarterly cover and interior design by Wolfgang Lederer 1980
Volume IV Number 3 Summer 1984
Volume VI Number 3 Summer 1986
Volume VI Number 4 Fall 1986
Volume VII Number 1 Winter 1987
Volume VIII Number 3 Summer 1988
Volume IX Number 4 October-November-December 1989

News From HEFFALUMP advertising brochure, illustrations by Wolfgang Lederer
Volume 1 Number 1 December 1986
Volume 2 Number 1 September 1987
Volume 2 Number 2 November 1987 with page 8 article, "Our Illustrator"

folder titled "Title pages, Broadsides"
Broadside for The Artists Portfolio 1987
"Sonnet on Chillon" no date
"Harold Berliner" Book Club of California no date
"Tristan Corbière Poems" 1988
"When We Belonged to Spain" 1983
"The Power Within Us" 1975
Twin Prints reproductions 1943
"Joy" 1989
"Music" 1984
"Memo to the Mountain Lion" 1984
"Lord..." 1989
"Wide and beautiful is the world..." 1984
"We need another and a wiser..." 1977

folder titled "Label, Layout, Cover and Jacket Dummies"
Group: Jacket, Label Comprehensive Sketches
Paul Masson Brandy no date
"Giovanni and Lusanna" first treatment no date
"Giovanni and Lusanna" second treatment no date
"The Poetry of Ezra Pound" no date
page, "Pickwick Papers" no date text and illustration
"Italian Music Incunabula" first treatment no date
"Italian Music Incunabula" second treatment no date
Helgerson Case no date
Helgerson/Jacket Sketch 1 no date
"Darkness Visible" no date
"The Italian Baroque Stage" no date
Foreword "We shape our buildings..." no date
"The Tudor Play of Mind" no date
"Puritans and Libertines" no date
"Orlando Innamorato" no date
"The Journal of Musicology" 1987 five treatments
"Film Quarterly" Summer 1960; Summer 1989

Various items
Large sheet "Litho Studies" Wolfgang Lederer 1934
Xerox copy, catalog, "Books, Broadsides & Maps: A Catalog of Letterpress Publications" Harold Berliner Items designed by Wolfgang Lederer
"Harold Berliner's Typefoundry" information booklet
also price list February 1988
cards and announcements:
Society of Graphic Arts announces that Wolfgang Lederer will talk informally on the life and work of Hugo Steiner-Prag February 26 (no year) (postcard)
SGA Meeting March 18 (no year) to view Steiner-Prag exhibition and again hear Wolfgang Lederer (postcard). Both cards kindness of Albert Sperison.
Book Club of California invitation to an exhibition: Wolfgang Lederer Selections from 50 years of work in Prague, Vienna, New York, and the Bay Area July through August 30, 1984. Postcard invitation kindness of Ruth Teiser.
Small page, typography and illustration, from Hamlet, beginning "Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes..."

folder titled "Comments on work and teaching, Awards, etc., Letters" 16 items
September 2, 1942 Grace L. McCann Morley, San Francisco Museum of Art
August 13, 1954 Spencer Macky, California College of Arts and Crafts
June 2, 1970 Betsy Adler, student
June 5, 1975 Hans A. Halbey, Klingspor Museum, Offenbach, Germany
January 30, 1980 Louise George Clubb, Department of Italian, University of California, Berkeley
July 14, 1980 Charles Neider, author, University of California, Santa Cruz
September 25, 1984 County of Marin, resolution of commendation
1984 Judges' commentaries, Bookbuilders West Show
August 21, 1985 Nicolas J. Perella, Department of Italian, University of California, Berkeley
February 12, 1987 Marian Green, Journal of Musicology Louisville, Kentucky
October 26, 1987 Ogden Dunbar, author, Department of Dramatic Art, University of California, Berkeley
March 15, 1990 Maria Epes re: Representations
May 15, 1990 Susan C. Silk, Columbia Foundation
August 16, 1990 Michael Cronan, AIGA
August 28, 1990 Geoff Link, San Francisco Study Center
no date Steve Reoutt, Book Club of California

also additional items

Appendix C

Wolfgang Lederer

Q. Wolfgang, how many years since you began working?

A. 55 years, I am afraid. (chuckles)

Q. And did you work originally in Europe?

A. I started in Vienna, then Prague and then I came in '39 to New York. It started in 1936 in Vienna and continued in Prague then resumed in New York.

Q. Did you finish your education in Prague or in Vienna?

A. I finished my education in Prague. My graphic design education I had exclusively in Prague.

Q. What can you say about the best time and worst time in your career to date?

A. Well, the worst time I'd rather forget! (chuckles) The best time is always the last one. I think the last 15 years. There is something special about the last 15 years because I concentrated more on the work on my desk rather than to split myself between 2 days teaching and the work on my desk and, in addition to that I returned after long detours to my first love which is books. So I have cherished this time.

Actually, I'd like to say something about the worst times. The worst times are always when I get a piece of work back that I have produced and I find it's lousy. I have to live with it because it is there. It's printed and I cannot change anything anymore.

Q. It's lousy not because of anybody else's failure but your own?

A. Well, sometimes it's somebody else's failure but then I cannot blame myself for it. But if I find after half a year of not seeing it and then see something that really bothers me- or I think it is a bore or whatever I consider is bad, then I really agonize. So, These are my worst times.

Q. What, if anything, frightens you about being a designer?

A. Frightens me? Well, what frightens me truly is how good the others are. I always feel they are so much better. That frightens me.

Q. And is that something you have always felt?

A. Always been. I was always a great admirer of others. And I think it is quite justified.

Q. Could you comment on the advent of the computer as a design tool? What do you think it can't and maybe won't ever do?

A. Well, I think the computer is here and we should wholeheartedly accept it. I cannot see doomdayers who say that because things change, they change for that reason- for something less good. When people talk about that I am reminded about the beginnings of Gutenberg whose invention was a blow to the fine book because the fine book was the handwritten book and he even, by casting many letters in ...rious forms, had to almost hide the fact that a book was ...ted. So, certain things get lost, certain things ...hange. But to my mind, the computer is here and designers will make the most of it. I'm afraid I'm not the kind of person to do this. For me the computer has remained a big ogre that I don't truly grasp. But that's me at the age of almost 80. But while I feel strongly that a computer can aid in graphic design work and can facilitate all kinds of things immensely, it can never invent and it cannot make decisions.

Q. What is the designer's responsibility with respect to the environment?

A. Well, I know the general question that is implied here. That is the question about what today is being talked about as environment. I have spent my life considering the environment. What I see daily and since I live in the cities I am considerably more concerned as designer about what is happening in our cities' environments and I have always felt that since what the graphic designer does is seen much more and more frequently and more obviously than what you see in the museums and is presented as art. There is a tremendous responsibility for the designer to try to contribute to what is seen daily in photos, billboards, signage, newspapers and magazines to make a better visual environment there. As a matter of fact, it was one of the bases of my whole teaching idea- to instill in young people a sense of responsibility there. To merely say that this is what goes as best design at the present time is not enough. Graphic design of course was formerly not clearly separated from advertising design, and I know that I always had to defend myself against accusations of not presenting "the real world", as it is called. But you don't have to do everything as the real world wants it. Either as human beings defending our morality or as designers defending quality, or let's not even say quality, but just basic decent standards in design.

Q. What inspires you?

A. Wow! Well, I would say that I have learned one cannot live on inspiration. Because inspiration is something that happens and it happens to the geniuses all the time. It has happened to me a few times I would say. My inspiration is working with other people, talking to them, getting from them a feel how they are and what they react to. Get a feel of the problem. Work with the copy as a material that has to be organized, grouped, presented. Work with the illustrations and how they contribute, and out of all this, images emerge from which I will then make either by way of sketches or trying to visualize it in other ways what the end result ultimately should be. I think the inspiration comes from the nature of the problems, from the nature of the conditions and most of all from the endless limitations that are given. What can be done, what sizes, what papers, what budgets are available and what the demands of the message are.

Q. So you do see limitations as an inspiration?

A. Absolutely! Yes, that puts it in a nutshell. Yes! Right!

Q. Where do your ideas come from?

A. I don't know how to answer that question really. I look around endlessly as far as design is concerned. Of course I study the design of others and there are certain people who appeal to me and who undoubtedly influence me. As a matter of fact, I can pinpoint that even. Certain people like Herman Zapf, for whom I have an endless admiration, and who have very much influenced me. In Europe it was the type designer E.R. Weiss who designed beautiful typefaces and was a fabulous designer and also illustrator. These people were very much my idols. What was the question? What are my ideas or my inspirations?

Q. Where do your ideas come from?

A. Well, I'm afraid they don't all come from me. I would be the last one not to admit my dependence on others.

Q. When you were a student, were there other specific individuals who were strong influences on you?

A. Well, there were the great German illustrators and book designers. There was Ehmke. There was Weiss. There was also one of my teachers, Steiner-Prag, who was a leading man in the European design field. There was Hadank. Name them and they all had an influence on me. Then I had the good fortune when I was seventeen. I saw an exhibition of French poster designs. That was an unforgetable eye-opener because suddenly I was confronted with Cassandres, Carlus and a whole world openend to me. I should add something here about the environment. We talked about that a moment ago. I remember in Paris when I studied there in '33-'34. There was a large empty wall on the side of a building. without windows. On that was painted a gigantic poster by Cassandre. And instead of being a horror which any kind of billboard here usually is, it was a breathtaking piece of beauty. It was a poster for camembert cheese of all things. Unforgetable! That is to my mind also an answer to the question about the environment. What these people could contribute to their environment- and at the same time create fabulous communications. Because that was camembert that you wanted to eat right then and there.

Q. What forces you to change your perspective?

A. The clients. The nature of the problem. The nature of the technology. The nature of what can be done. I think that changes all the time. I have very little in me to change for change's sake. That's why I have remained a traditionalist. What I have once loved I don't abandon very easily. So for that reason, my work has very little changed over the years. I think it has intensified. It has become richer, all kinds of things, but essentially the main direction has remained.

Q. Of course that's one of the reasons you work in the field of books because that's so tradition bound?

A. Yes, but of course even there one can be adventurous and I don't think that is very much in my nature. Fortunately there are areas where this kind of attitude is welcome and has its place.

Q. What magazines do you subscribe to?

A. Well, I do subscribe to the one magazine that I do not not find in the libraries where I regularly go where I see Graphis and Print, that is Fine Print, which is unfortuantely on the way out or undergoing a great deal of change. But of course I love Graphis, Print and CA magazines and I wouldn't want to be without them. But I don't subscribe because I have a house full of books and I don't want to clutter it any more.

Q. Who has been a major influence on you? (Not necessarily a designer)

A. Well, the greatest influence in my life was undoubtedly Steiner-Prag whose intimate friend I became.-Who was my mentor and who was an unusually imaginative, intellectually rich person with a wonderful way of formulating in words what he is talking about, thereby enriching me in more than one way. Not only in my comprehension of what graphic design or book design or typography is all about, but also in human comprehension. He has remained a great influence on me and it is quite interesting to me that recently somebody came from New Jersey for 3 days to interview me about him because that person is writing a biography on Steiner-Prag. That brought this whole area to life again and in pulling out these books I became aware- the books that he had illustrated and designed. I became aware of what influence he'd had on me. The School of Fine Arts and the DeYoung Museum had, I think in '47, one-man shows of his paintings, drawings, graphic and illustration work. At that time I lectured rather widely about him and his work. People were always very much interested. Nowadays his name has, in this country, no particular ring, although he actually died working in this country, but only a few years.

Q. What is the best book you ever read?

A. Well, (chuckles), I tell you something. The book that spontaneously comes to mind is Moby Dick. I don't think that Moby Dick is as wonderful a book as many others I have read like the Brothers Karamazov or the books by Thomas Mann or such but, it is to me the embodiment of what literature as an art represents. I am totally disinterested in ships. In seafaring. In hunting. In fish. The whole world of exclusively men has no appeal to me. So that, as far as subject matter is concerned, is as remote to me as anything could be. But then I read the first sentence of Moby Dick, I'm caught and I read the whole big book over again and I have done it twice. That to me is a miracle of what great literature really is.

Q. What is the best book you've ever seen?

A. I do not know what that...does that refer to book design?

Q. Well at least two avenues spring to mind. One is the book designed and also the best book that has been turned into a motion picture.

A. I think I have to bypass that question. There are so many beautifully designed books that I love and cherish, to say one is the best I would not know. And the relation to movies is even more foreign to me because I find that a movie should be created as a movie and a book should be created as a book. And I usually find the translation of a book into a movie as a sham. I have seen a few that independently are also good as movies. But essentially, the two are totally independent forms of invention and creation and they should remain that.

Q. Now that we've talked about movies, what is your favorite movie?

A. My favorites were the ones by Bergman. Without exception, virtually. They bowled me over and of course Dreams of a Summer Night did not bowl me over, but enchanted me endlessly.

Q. What was the biggest loophole in your education?

A. That I grew up in a family in which to talk about money was despised and to this day I do not understand the workings of money. Pure and simple. Fortunately I have a clever wife who handles these matters for me, but basically, it has remained a mystery to me. It has also limited my design output because I never knew how to exploit any kind of good situation for myself. I think in this day and age it shouldn't be that way. It's ridiculous that one should go through life and not understand one of the essential elements that we work with. I know that if I

spend money it is not there anymore, but that is as far as my economic understanding goes.

Q. Especially for you, Wolfgang, how have clients changed in the past 60 years?

A. They change all the time. Every one is entirely different and of course in Europe the character of the client was somewhat different because they considered themselves educated people who had opinions about how the designs should be formulated. They could talk a great deal about that with you. Here I find people are much more down-to-earth and say what they are after in terms of the end result and most of all the clients in America are much easier to deal with because they are more easy going, accessible, less forbidding if they are in a high position. I found that extremely agreeable when I came to this country. But how they have changed in 60 years, it's a very flattering question. I must say (chuckles) I would be hard put to say that in general terms. I was always interested in my clients and I always found them as different from each other as can be. I think I said at the beginning that the character of the client is at the initiation point of the design, always very much in evidence for me. The client means also in the case of book design not only the editor, but first and foremost the author. What he says and how that influences the attitude of what you are doing.

Q. What wisdom would you like to impart to your not-so-experienced colleagues?

A. Oh My God! If I would have to impart wisdom I would have to be a wise man, which I do not consider myself to be. So, well, after 60 years, I would like to encourage anybody to never give up. Be optimistic. If you look at things as they are being done, I speak now exclusively about the design world, you can easily say that for every step forward you find 3 steps backwards and you can do a lot of finger pointing in that direction. But I find a tremendous sense for optimism in what an ever changing scene wonderful people have continuously created. When I came here there was a 21 year old man by the name of Paul Rand. And you opened the newspaper and there were the Orbach advertisements and you were goggle eyed. What wonderful things you can do in a newspaper. Then came Lustig, Leonni, Glaser. Now, I don't want to flatter some people by naming names, but in any case, it has always gone on, and for me this has been a source of endless optimism in spite of the fact that I'm very often desperate about the mess that we are surrounded with. So my wisdom is don't give up believing that efforts ultimately will move things in a better direction or a changing direction. It's all part of life.
Is that wisdom?

On behalf of the AIGA membership, a special thank you to Wolfgang Lederer and Steve Reoutt for this poignant and inspiring gift.

Appendix D

Interview with Wolfgang Lederer in California College of Arts and Crafts Review, Winter 1971

TO DESIGN IS TO ORDER

Wolfgang Lederer Steers One of CCAC's Most Dynamic Programs

By MARILYN HAGBERG

To design is
to plan and organize,
to order, to relate
and to control

In short it embraces
all means opposing
disorder and accident

Therefore it signifies
a human need
and qualifies man's
thinking and doing

Consequently
a school of design
is not first an opportunity
to express oneself

It is an educational area
to teach systematically
and to learn step by step
—through practical work
and thus through experience—
observation and
articulation.

—Josef Albers

■ The quotation at the left, part of a longer statement by Albers, could well have been written by the man who introduced it to me: by Wolfgang Lederer, Director of CCAC's Division of Design. For it expresses perfectly the philosophy by which Professor Lederer creates and teaches and steers a program which, thanks to his strong but sensitive leadership, has developed into one of the College's best.

According to Wolfgang Lederer—and he's far from alone—the entire principle of design is order, and the designer's task, like the artist's, is to create order out of chaos. "Art is art because it is not life, but to be creative is not just a matter of having fun. Children can have fun," he says.

A frail-looking, highly articulate man with a grey goatee, Professor Lederer runs a tight ship for a division head at an American art school. Since many art schools have a tendency these days to become self-indulgent centers for freewheeling experimentation and "anything goes" standards—which too often means no standards at all—it's rather refreshing to find people—in this case an entire department—still dedicated to the idea of quality and to the search for order which has always defined the course of art and which always will if art, and with it the human spirit, is to survive at all.

It's just now, in fact, when those of us who are aware and sensitive are demanding a better environment and an improved quality of life, that designers, *real* designers, may be

more important than anybody else. They're the ones who'll have to plan the new cities, the new environments, the new systems, the new life styles, and who'll have to talk businessmen, developers, politicians and private citizens into buying their proposals. If they can indeed bring about something significant, they'll have people like Wolfgang Lederer to thank.

"Designers," he says, "are practical idealists, but ideas are no good without know-how. Quality is of the utmost importance, and there can be no quality without skill and discipline—in short, without craftsmanship."

CCAC's design courses are outlined idealistic and colored practical. As Mr. Lederer points out, "The College is not a trade school and we in the Design Division don't see our program as one of job-training. Our teaching is vitally concerned with what's going on in the various design fields right now, of course, but we also project toward the future by thinking in terms of leaders in the profession. We know, though, that the graduate will not be able to help his profession unless he can latch onto conditions as he'll find them when he leaves school. He'll need a job first of all."

Wolfgang Lederer's approach to teaching design is to use the individual student's core of interest in his chosen area as a point of departure for the widening of his total horizon. "The important thing is to offer him an education," he says. "Yet, unless he can step into a professional position after he has his degree, his education will not go on. He must learn, therefore, both what *should* be done and what *can* be done. We hope he can improve the profession, but that improvement must come from within; it cannot be achieved in the wilderness, or in the ivory tower."

Himself a professional graphic designer with a specialty in book design, and an enthusiastic draftsman and watercolorist as well, Professor Lederer has brought CCAC's design program up from a quite limited status to a major position as a highly respected and acclaimed academic division. When the gentle German-born designer began his teaching career at the College in 1941, there was no design department, only one basic design class, one advertising design class, and four students taking advanced graphic design. Today the Design Division has sixteen full- and part-time people teaching about 300 second, third and fourth year design majors and graduate students in the disciplines and practical applications of graphic, environmental and industrial design.

The men and women who comprise the Division's three departments all are successful practicing professional designers as well as teachers, either freelancers or partners or consultants with their own firms. Mr. Lederer has been influential in attracting some of the finest people in the field to CCAC.

In the graphic design department there's artist-designer Emma Elsner, illustrator Helen Bregner, calligrapher Byron Macdonald, and designers Steve Reoutt and Joe Cleary in addition to Professor Lederer. The industrial designers are Morris Barnett, Dean Snyder and Robert Onodera. The fairly new (1968) environmental design department, which grew out of the earlier interior design program, is infested with initials: environmental and interior designers Andy Addkison and Wallace Jonason, A.I.D. Accredited, Willis Kauffman, N.S.I.D., and Emil Barnich, A.I.D.; and architect Robert Overstreet, A.I.A. The Division's part-time instructors include the College's graphics design manager Louis Shawl; Building and Grounds supervisor Richard Corey, who this spring is launching a shop-training program; and drawing teacher Kenneth Rignall, whose regular beat is the Fine Arts Division.

Over the years, Wolfgang Lederer and his faculty and students have won numerous design awards, far too many for enumeration here. Worth mentioning, though, is the fact that the College has three times received the gold medal in the St. Regis Paper Company's National Packaging Design Contest—a record equaled only by Los Angeles' Art Center School, where design is *the* program, not part of the program.

Professor Lederer is very proud of that. He's also proud of his many former students who've made top marks in their profession—among them Don Fujimoto, art director for Addison-Wesley, textbook publishers; William Adamo, design director for Southern California Carton Co.; Hisashi Nakamuto, art group supervisor for Hoefer Dieterich & Brown; Ken Lavey, vice president in charge of design for W.L. Frohlich and Company of New York, Montreal, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo; Lowell Herrero, nationally known designer and illustrator; Tomie de Paola, an illustrator of numerous children's books; and Ed Sturgeon, art director for Container Corporation of America.

"I'm proud, too, that I've had some excellent students in my design classes who've made names for themselves as painters or printmakers—like Robert Bechtle, Charles Gill, Ralph Borge and Nathan Oliviera. What they have told me about the meaning of their design classes as part of their training attests to the value of a broad education for the artist," he says.

What originally attracted Wolfgang Lederer to CCAC 30 years ago, he says, was "the chance to have a tightly knit program of design in close relationship with other departments. This relationship is hard to maintain now that the College is larger, but I still believe strongly in the interdependence of the arts. Just as design cannot be a thing apart from art or from life, the strength of a school comes from the working together of its components."

Mr. Lederer chose to enter the field of design himself because he "wanted to find an art activity that would be useful in an immediate way—to create things that would bring repercussions." It was obvious from the beginning that he'd make his career in some art endeavor, however, for as he says, he "grew up with art in all its forms."

He was born in Mannheim, Germany, into a family "that talked about everything except money." His father was a symphony and opera conductor and his mother came from a family deeply involved with art and literature. Wolfgang and his two brothers were constantly surrounded by art, literature and music, all of which have continued to be important to Professor Lederer. Whenever he can break away from his many duties at CCAC, he listens to music, reads, sketches and paints.

Once he had chosen his course, he studied at the Academy of Graphic Arts in Leipzig, the Academie Scandinave in Paris, and the Officina Pragensis in Prague. In Paris his teacher was the Fauvist Othon Friesz, and in Prague his mentor was Hugo Steiner-Prag, one of Europe's leading book designers and

Detail of a program design for the North Shore Friends of Opera's fourth season (1964/65).

design educators. The latter's friendship and guidance exerted a profound influence on the young Lederer, who eventually became Steiner-Prag's assistant and taught off and on for two years at the Pragensis, interrupting his association there to work as a book designer in Vienna from 1936 to 1938. When Adolph Hitler moved into Austria, he returned to Prague.

"But Hitler soon followed me there," says Mr. Lederer, "so in 1939 I went to New York City and worked for two years as a freelance designer, mainly for book publishers."

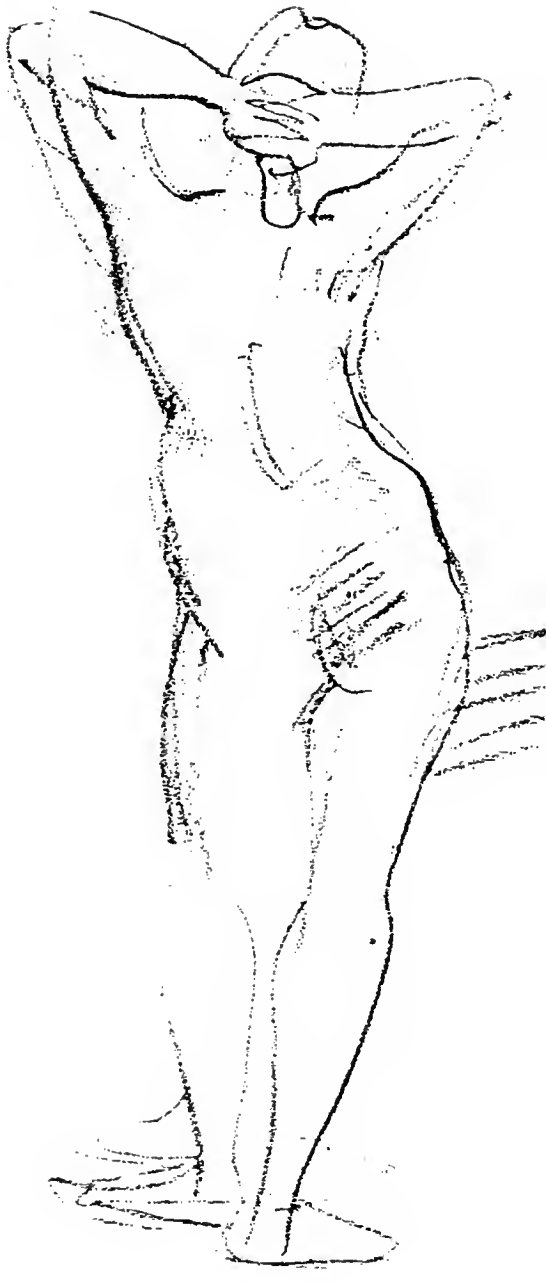
He came to San Francisco in 1941 to visit an Austrian girl named Hanni whom he'd known in Vienna. By coincidence, he met Dr. Frederick Meyer, who invited him to teach at CCAC. "I liked the school and decided to stay," he says. Two years later he and Hanni were married. The Lederers now live in Marin County's charming Mill Valley, whose environs they enjoy exploring on foot, and have two grown sons. One recently returned from a three-year stint as an English teacher with the Peace Corps in Somalia, East Africa, and is now principal of a two-room school in Hollister; the other is an engineer currently in India with the Peace Corps.

All the while he has taught graphic design at CCAC and headed the design programs, Professor Lederer has continued his career as a designer. Besides designing book jackets, covers and layouts for several publishing houses, among them the University of California Press, the University of Nevada Press, Harold Berliner, and Chronicle Books, he has done advertising and promotional design in all its forms and has designed labels, letterheads, trademarks, posters and greeting cards for various clients.

From 1942 until 1964, when he resumed freelancing and returned to his first love, book designing, Mr. Lederer was art director of Wine Publications and Western Farm Publications in San Francisco. This long association grew out of the label and package designs he did for a number of Napa Valley wineries (Paul Masson, Charles Krug, Christian Brothers, and others) when he first settled in the Bay Area.

He always comes back to books. In designing for publishers, his concern is "to form a companionship between literature and design." As with all his commissions, his designs are suggested by the material and style of a subject; never does he impose a preconceived idea on a book or other product. As a result, his work is tremendously versatile, running from sketchy and illustrative to elegantly stylized, from serious to whimsical. In each design, though, there is a graceful simplicity created by his excellent design and draftsmanship and crisp lettering—and the craftsmanship of a master.

Mr. Lederer also has exhibited his drawings and watercolors from time to time. His first one-man show was in Vienna, and he has since had solo exhibits in San Francisco



One of Professor Lederer's many figure studies.

and Oakland and has been represented in faculty shows at CCAC. Last spring, while he was enjoying his first sabbatical leave from the College, he spent four weeks sketching people, places and landscapes in Northern Italy—"for stimulation and discipline," he says.

He also visited friends and renewed old haunts in Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin and Zurich and combined some business with pleasure by visiting the State Academy for Graphic Design, Advertising and Printing in West Berlin and the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich.

At both schools Professor Lederer was struck by the formality of the programs and the high quality of work emerging from them. "My observations were brief and casual and may not be totally accurate," he says, "but the standards at both institutions seem uniform, with the emphasis on the perfection of craftsmanship." Dedicated as he is himself to excellence, however, he feels that the pursuit of perfection can lead to a boring monotony and rigidity. "The looser system in American art schools produces some sloppy work, but it also encourages diversity and imaginative freedom," he says. "The ideal, of course, would be to combine the German and Swiss love of perfection with American vitality, freedom and love of variety and novelty."

In talking of that goal, Wolfgang Lederer recalls the Matisse exhibition which he saw in Paris last spring. "It included some beautiful statements by Matisse on the artist's need for discipline and control, the sources of ultimate freedom. Matisse himself embodied this idea in a wonderful way," he says. "He grew from his own discipline to tremendous freedom." □

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Harriet Siegel Nathan

University of California at Berkeley alumna with two Journalism degrees: A.B. in 1941 and M. J. in 1965. Wrote for the on-campus paper, The Daily Californian ("Monarch of the College Dailies") as reporter, columnist, assistant women's editor, and managing editor. Prepared President Sproul's biennial report to the Legislature, 1942-44; wrote advertising copy; edited house journals; served on local and state boards of the League of Women Voters primarily in local and regional government and publications. As a graduate student, wrote for the University's Centennial Record. Worked as an interviewer/editor at the Regional Oral History Office part-time from the mid-sixties; concurrently served the Institute of Governmental Studies as Principal Editor doing editing, writing, research, production, and promotion of Institute publications. Wrote journal articles; and a book, Critical Choices in Interviews: Conduct, Use, and Research Role (1986) that included oral history interviews in the analysis. Also with Nancy Kreinberg co-authored the book, Teachers' Voices, Teachers' Wisdom: Seven Adventurous Teachers Think Aloud (1991), based on extended interviews with the teachers.